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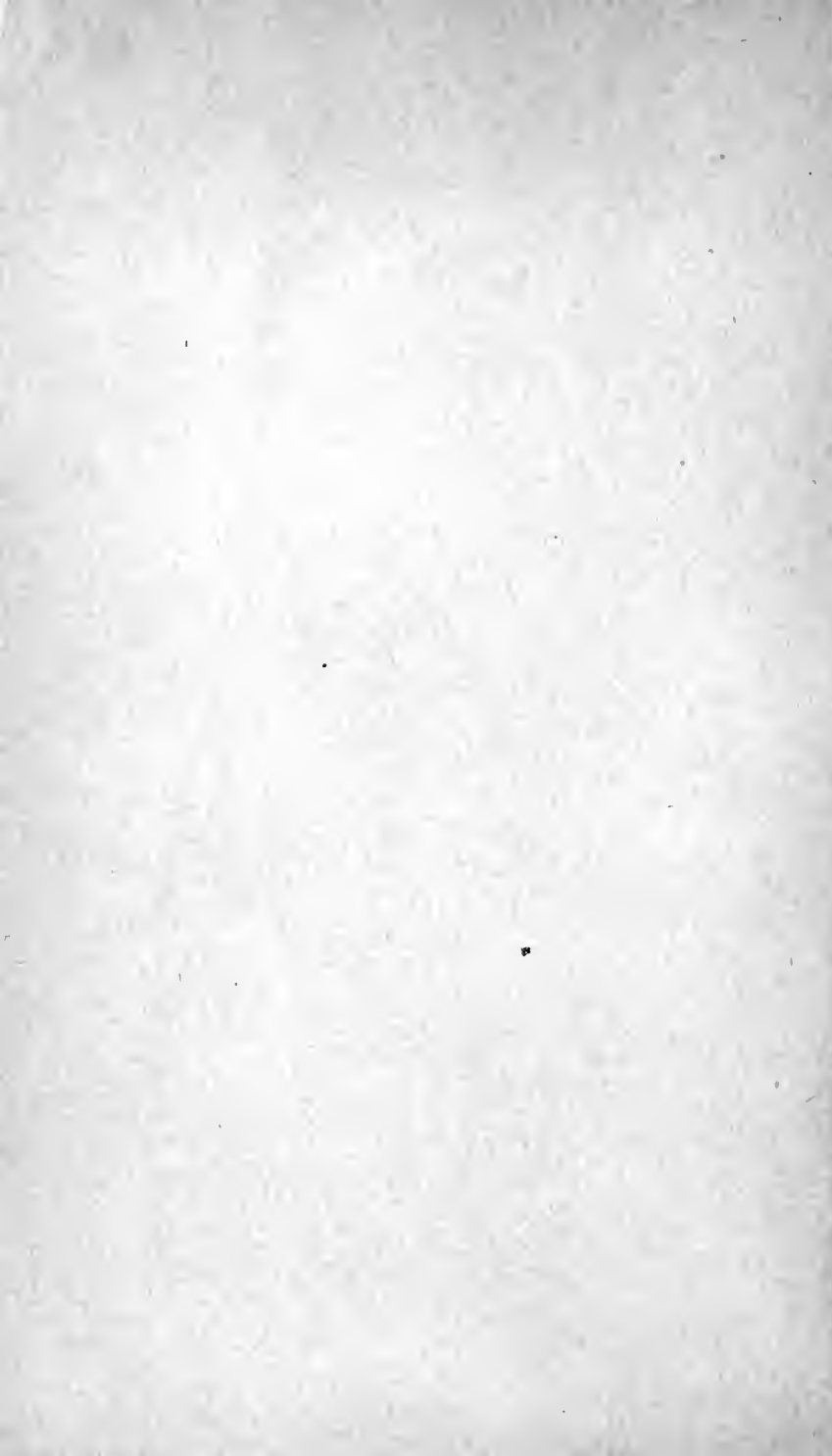
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"HERE YOU!" THE MAN OF THE SEA SAID HOARSELY.

On An Australian Farm.

Ben-Joane

Page 113.

ON AN AUSTRALIAN FARM

BY

STEELE RUDD

(A. H. DAVIS)

AUTHOR OF "On Our Selection;" "Our New Selection;"
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CHAPTER I.

The Biter Bit.

A COLD winter morning at "Fairfield." The land was white with frost. The wood-heap, smothered in it, lay like a mass of melting salt, and on the water in the trough by the windmill rested a sheet of ice twenty feet long. Cold! it *was* cold!

"Heggs an' bacon; bacon an' heggs," said old John Dashwood, rubbing his horny hands together as he cheerily eyed the savoury breakfast his wife set on the table of the old-fashioned country kitchen.

Then as he took his seat—the seat nearest the stove—and proceeded to "serve out": "What be for you, James?"

James, the eldest son, was about twenty-one.

"Eggs and bacon, I suppose, Father," drawled he, his frost-bitten face, after a hard scrubbing in the "roller" towel, hanging outside, glowing like an Australian sunset.

"An' thee, Peter?"

"Bacon and eggs," said Peter with a laugh.

Peter was the second son, and had inherited his parent's peculiar idea of humour. And old John's idea of humour was to make jokes—good, bad, and indifferent jokes—and to enjoy them himself.

"Be there no 'n' else for break'ast, mother?" And old John's eyes roamed round in search of the rest of the family.

"Polly and Tilly are at the separator," Mrs. Dashwood answered—"don't mind them, they'll have theirs directly, along with Grandma and little Andy."

"Ah-h—— then what abaht 'n' self, Mother?"

"Oh, I'll wait and take mine with the others, too, Father."

"Ah-h; then beint so, Ah'll help maself to a little o' heach." And old John proceeded to burden his plate with "heggs an' bacon, and bacon an' heggs."

Mrs. Dashwood smiled at the simple, good-natured husband, and said:

"Is that what you call a little of each, John?"

"Thet wer' what ma old gran'fether alez used to say, Elahser," he explained, drawing his knife through the fried egg in several directions and leaving a track that resembled the Southern Cross. "Heggs an' bacon, bacon an' heggs, wer' a great old sayin' o' his, poor old boy!"

"He must have been a humorous old boy; that grandfather of yours, Father," James, the cynic of the family, put in without lifting his head.

Old John stared at his wife and grinned. Then he looked at James. He seemed to suspect James of insincerity. Finally he said:

"Ah-h. It never struck me that he wer', lad, when he wer' alahve; but when Ah coomes to look at some o' his

great gran'sons Ah thinks he must ha' hed a lot o' it abaht 'n." And he broke into a series of low, rumbling chuckles, which he put down to the score against James.

Peter, with a loud, shrill laugh, joined in his parent's mirth, and rocked about on his chair in thorough enjoyment of the joke.

To Peter, old John was the fountain of humour—he was the wag, the wit, the comic opera of the farm.

"Fine! jolly fine indeed, Father—really splendid!" he shrieked in commendation. Then he rocked about again, and, to emphasise his appreciation, struck the corner of the table with his hand, and kicked his feet about, till Tom, the cattle dog, who always lurked unmolested there at meal-times, was compelled to defend himself. Tom, an impartial sort of dog, promptly defended himself by biting James on the calf of the leg. James immediately made trouble.

"Oh, wow! oh—th' devil!" he cried with extraordinary suddenness, and, in a wild effort to lift all of himself above the table, lost a lot of his bacon and eggs.

Old John misunderstood the situation.

"Never mahnd, lad," he said apologetically—never mahnd." And, reaching over, he administered a soothing pat to the crown of his son's head. "Ah wouldn't hurt yow'er feelin's; noh, noh."

"Feelings! It wasn't *you*," James growled. "That infernal dog under there!" And he kicked out blindly at Tom.

Old John understood.



"Oh, Wow!—Oh!—Th' Devil!"

"What! did'n bahte thee?" he asked in surprise.

"Did he!" and James sulkily reached down and rubbed the wound, then aimed another kick at the canine.

Old John ordered Tom to leave the kitchen.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" Peter broke out in a most unexpected sort of way. "It was—was *me!*" he cried, throwing himself back. "I remember *now*, touching Tom with my foot. Ha ha, ha ha! And he bit James. Ha ha, ha ha!" Peter spread himself all over his breakfast, and shed tears of delight on it.

"Ah-h!" and old John eyed the laughing one with serious countenance. "Then shouldst been thee to get th' bahte."

"Yes! Ha Ha Ha!" the other yelled.

"Ah-h!"

Old John seemed to feel that there had been a miscarriage of justice.

"Of course! Ha Ha, Ha Ha!" from Peter again. "That's where all the fun of it is,—don't you *see* it, Father?" Convulsions seemed to take hold of Peter. He threw himself about until his breakfast toppled over on to the floor. And Tom, who hadn't obeyed his master's command to leave the premises, instantly pounced on the fallen provender.

"Strut! Strut! look at 'n!" old John exclaimed.

"Tom! Shah! Oh, you brute! my eggs!" from Peter.

"Flick! flop!" from Tom; and all that was left for Peter to rescue was a clean plate.

"Did 'n get it?" old John, who had half risen in his place, asked excitedly.

"Did he *what*, Father!" and Peter, with a sort of grin, displayed the empty plate.

Peter's loss acted as a palliative to James, who brightened up.

"Serves you right," he said with a pleased smile. "It'll stop some of your tomfoolery perhaps."

"A case o' th' bahter bein' bit," said the parent, with a philosophical grin, as he settled down to proceed with his breakfast.

"But that doesn't apply in this case, does it, Father?" Peter answered.

Peter was a student of logic, and, in a heart-breaking kind of way, was always engaging his parent in debate.

"In this instance I was not the *biter*," he went on—"you must admit that?"

For a moment old John reflected hard. His love of argument was even greater than Peter's.

Peter laughed. He always laughed when he felt he had his opponent cornered. He always laughed when he felt he was cornered himself.

"You see, *James* was the person bit," he giggled, going deep into the matter for the benefit of his baffled sire.

"Well?" said old John calmly—"an' what then, lad?"

"And *Tom* was the biter; isn't that so?"

"So, lad."

"Then how can you make out that the *biter* was bit,

Father? Tom you admit was the biter—well, who bit Tom?”

“Oh, shut up and have your breakfast!” in tones of disgust from James.

“Noh, noh!” protested old John, upholding Peter’s attitude, “let ’n ’lone; let ’n ’lone.” And putting down his knife and fork he looked steadily at Peter like a huge snake mesmerising its breakfast.

“Now, see ’n here,” he said, “it wer’ thee, lad, who wert at fault, he kickin’ of Tom, and causin’ ’n to baht James, wert so?”

Peter nodded his head, and grinned asent.

“Thee caused the act, lad?”

Peter assented again.

“Thet beint so, then ’twer thee bit James. lad, and not Tom. Wert so?” And a grin came into old John’s face that broadened and broadened like the light spreading over the sky at daybreak.

“Good! By Jove, very good—very fine, Father,” Peter broke out when he saw the logic of his parent’s brilliant argument. Peter was liberal and just in debate.

“I never saw it that way; blessed if I did,” he added. “And I was sure I had you beat for once.”

“Ah-h, noh,” said old John, shaking his head, “no un ever had me lad—’cept it might ’a’ been your mother.”

“Except mother?” Peter echoed, wonderingly.

Mrs. Dashwood, who had just entered from the inner part of the house, smiled and said:

"Indeed, I'm sure your mother never had *him*, Peter."

"Noh?" responded old John, with another grin. "If that wert so, mother, an' yo' never had me, Ah'd be single yet. Ho, Ho, Ho!" And he laughed heavily at his own peculiar joke; while Peter, who regarded it as a brilliant corruscation, yelled in cheerful appreciation. James, with a look of torment in his face, turned to Peter and snapped: "Have a bit of sense!"

But Peter was only provoked into fresh merriment, and, when he recovered, pointed his fork at James, and addressing his parent, cried:

"*He* doesn't see the joke, Father."

"Doan't un see it, lad?" old John asked in a sympathetic way of James.

"See it!" the other grunted contemptuously, "it's hard to see a thing that's not there."

"Not there?" cried old John. Ah-h? Noh? is'n not?" And he laughed at James for having no sense of humour. "Ah wouldn't lahke to be born lahke thee, lad," he added, and went on eating.

Peter laughed several more bars at James's expense. James silently reached across and helped himself to another egg.

"Thee baint be blahnd in every way, then, lad?" came slowly from old John. "Thee can see th' point o' a hegg in front of yow easy enough!"

More noise from Peter, and when his mirth was ended, James, steadily devouring the egg, looked up and drawled:

“Yes, I can see the point of a egg when it’s before me without any trouble; but I suppose either of you can see the hen there as well?”

Peter felt inclined to laugh, but controlled himself. He seemed in doubt as to whether James had really made a joke or not.

“Well, noh, lad, noh; *but*——” And old John paused; while Peter, his mouth agape, his eyes sparkling in joyful anticipation of the gem of humour he knew was about to fall from his brilliant parent, sat ready to greet it with full measure of merriment—“boot we’s may be able to see the checkin.”

The laugh that burst from Peter, could it have been staged, would have enriched a theatrical manager. Old John’s red, glossy face broke out into acres of smiles as he looked up and gazed in a self-satisfied sort of way at Mrs. Dashwood.

Peter’s excessive mirth irritated James.

“Well, I’m hanged if I know,” he said, “what the deuce the Government want to protect laughing jackasses for.”

But his satire was too subtle. It was altogether beyond the comprehension of the others. They suspected him of trying to evade the subject, and regarded him as a fugitive from the stings of their witticisms.

“Protect laughin’ jackesses, lad?” grinned old John, filling his mouth with bacon. “No un be atalkin’ abaht *them*.”

There was an interruption. Granny Dashwood, mother of old John, huddled beneath a brown shawl, and a white calico cap which sat on her head like a home-made pen-wiper, hobbled into the breakfast table, rubbing her long, bony hands together.

"Ah be ahearin' great foon amang yow," she squeaked, crouching into a seat beside James.

"It was the jackasses you heard, Granny," James answered, speaking into her ear.

"Jaik Hedley?" said Granny, looking round the table, "be he amang yow?"

"*Jeckesses*, he said, Mother," old John shouted in a loud voice.

Granny, whose sense of hearing was most unreliable, made an ear trumpet of her hand and said:

"Who?"

Peter laughed. Granny cast a look of scorn at him.

"*Jackasses*, Grandma," Mrs. Dashwood said, approaching the aged one's chair. Then in remonstrance with the cheerful one: "You mustn't laugh at her, Peter!"

"This kind of jackass, Granny!" and James, with his thumb, indicated Peter.

"Jaik Hedley," Granny rattled on, "roon'd off with Mrs. Belly Brown when us wer' ashepperdin' on The Falls, an' no un never see him again but Sammy Selby. He seen his ghost. Yes, he seen he's ghost. It was about 8 o'clock one naht when he be camped at th' crick——"

A general laugh went round the table at Granny.

"Oh, Sammy ded," Granny persisted. "He swore to it when he wer' alahve. He seen th' ghost coom oop aht o' th' watter in the middle o' th' naht, an' it set raht besahd un. We wer' ashepperdin' at The Falls——"

Old John, pointing to the breakfast dish, shouted:

"Doan't mahnd th' ghost, Mother. What'll yow take, heggs an' bacon or bacon an' heggs?"

"It's forty-nahne year sence Jaik Hedley went off," Granny continued, "an' yow wasn't born then, mah boy——"

"Ah wern't?" interrupted old John, "wern't born forty-nahne year ago? Ho, Ho, Ho! Ah-h, an' many a year afore 'n', if Ah remembers raht. (Lifting his voice.) Yow fergets Ah wer' born at sea, Mother."

"Oh, that accounts for you being always at sea now, Father!" Peter, delighted at the opportunity to make a joke, broke in.

"What 'n did thou say?" Granny asked, fixing her sunken eyes on Peter.

"Peter is only joking with his father, Granny," Mrs. Dashwood tried to explain. "Don't mind him."

"In chokey—his father?" Granny chirped. "Noh, mah boy wer' never in th' chokey; but mah good man, James, wer', but only for a moonth."

Here Granny broke off into meditation, and old John felt called upon to make an explanation in the family interest.

"What she's thinkin' abaht," he said, "wer' one

tahme yow'er grandfather walloped a chap for sayin' something to him, an' he wer' fined two pounds or a month in the lock-up."

"And he preferred the lock-up, eh, Father?" Peter put in.

"Ah-h, he preferred the lock-up, 'cause he wanted the money."

Then to Granny:

"Will you have a hegg?"

"No, she won't have any, John," Mrs. Dashwood said. "I've some porridge in the stove for her," and she turned and placed a plate of steaming porridge before Granny.

"Yes, it be forty-one year since Jaik Hedley dahed," Granny proceeded again, and Peter broke out with a loud "Ha Ha Ha! it was forty-nine awhile ago."

"She can't get over Jack Hadley," Mrs. Dashwood said with an amused smile, "can she?"

"Yow have got Jack Hedley on th' brain, Mother," said old John.

Granny looked up at him and answered:

"Yow think it will rain? Ah thinks it will too, mah boy. Mah back and mah poor knces wer' all a achin' this mornin'."

Peter nearly went into fits.

Polly and Tilley bounced in from the dairy.

"Whatever on earth is going on?" Polly exclaimed. "We could hear Peter yelling a mile off—and just look at him now."

"Hear him!" Tilly added. "He laughs like a great calf. Listen to him. What in the name of goodness is he laughing at? Have you been making a fresh lot of jokes, Father?"

"Me? Well, yes," old John answered calmly. "It wer'——"

He was interrupted by Granny.

"Mah poor pet lemps," she said caressingly to the robust, fair-skinned girls, "yow're perished with th' coald. Come yow to the fire an' get warm (starting to rise from her seat). Ah'll bring summit to put on yow'er showlders."

The two girls pounced on the kindly-disposed grandmother and gently forced her back into her chair.

"Just you stay where you are and have a good breakfast, Granny," they said, "we're as warm as toast. You know you shouldn't have got up until we came to dress you."

Granny felt their hands.

"Poor little kittens!" she murmured, "yow're cold as death."

"Ha, ha, ha!" from Peter. "They were pet lambs a minute ago—now they're kittens. They'll be cats directly. Ha, ha, ha, Tom-cats! Ha ha, ha ha, just about fits them, don't you think so, Father?"

"More lahke tom-boys," was his parent's answer, and Peter became seized with a fresh spasm of mirth, in the throes of which he upset his tea.

"Look at the silly!" Polly cried. "I knew Father would crown it."

Peter gasped "Tom-boys; that's just what they are. Ha ha, ha ha!"

"Oh, *you!*" Tilly snapped. "I'd sooner be a tom-boy any day than a Tom Thumb."

Tilly was reflecting on her brother's small stature. Peter was undersized for his age.

"Or a tomfool!" James put in.

It was the girls' turn to laugh, now.

Peter's eyes rolled about in his head, and he seemed lost for a suitable retort.

"Cans't not answer 'n, lad?" old John queried, looking at Peter.

"No, he's waiting for you to do it for him, Father," Polly said.

Old John laughed.

"Doan't let 'n beat yow," he went on. "Hit 'n hard, lad."

"I was trying to think of something I saw in the book I was reading last night," Peter stammered, scratching his head in pretence to recall a quotation that would silence his sisters—something about the want—the want of——"

"Oh yes, I know," Tilly laughed. "Want is the scorn of every boyish fool, and wit in rags, Peter (reaching over and tugging at a rent in his jacket), is turned to ridicule."

All but old John and Granny joined in the laugh against Peter.

"Was that what you were trying to think of?" James asked maliciously of his brother. But Peter was a good actor in times of distress. He shook his head and snapped his fingers and said:

"No; I'm blowed if I can think what it was now."

"It baint be that," old John said with a wise air. "That be from aht the Bahble, mah girl."

Tilly, who was a good reader, and had just left the Grammar School, exchanged a laugh with James, also a reader.

"The Bible? Oh Father!" she said.

"Ah-h, the Bahble," replied old John confidently, "but it baint be any argerment for yow, girl, for it also sez, an' what he ought to 'a' thought on (meaning Peter). 'Aht on the mahths o' babes an' sooklin's eoomes wurds o' wesdom.'"

"Ha, ha, ha; ho, ho, ho!" yelled Peter. "The very thing I was trying to think of. It takes you, Father."

Old John was delighted with himself. His eyes became obscured behind the rolls of skin that gathered in his face as he leaned back and chuckled.

"What he was trying to think of!" James guffawed incredulously, as he rose and went off to work.

"*That* was from the Bible, Father," Tilly conceded pleasantly, "but you surely don't want to make out that I'm a babe or a suckling, do you?" (Appealing to Granny as she took a seat beside her), "Do you think I am, Granny?"

“What be yow sayin’, mah babby?” asked Granny.

“There you are. Ha, ha, ha!” from Peter, as he kicked out with both legs. “Father is right again—right every time.”

“Well, you needn’t show your pleasure by bruising one with your big hob-nail boots!” Tilly dissented.

“Did I kick you? Ha, ha, ha! I kicked Tom awhile ago and he bit James for it. Ha, ha, ha!” Peter replied.

“Ah-h, well, girl,” old John drawled, rising to leave, “wi’ all the edecation yow can’t beat the old man yet.”

Then pausing as he strode past Mrs. Dashwood to reach the door:

“Can um, Mother? (putting his arms about her) What say, Elahser?”

Shrieks of laughter came from Peter.

“Stop it John!” Mrs. Dashwood said, struggling from her frolicking husband. “Be quiet, will you?”

“Kiss her, Father,” Polly counselled mischievously.

“Ah would thet same.” And old John proceeded to prove his words. Loud expressions of delight greeted Mrs. Dashwood’s attempts to escape the embraces of her husband.

“What be he tryin’ to do?” Granny asked.

“Father and Mother are courting again,” Tilly cried into her ear.

“The boys used to love Granny one tahme,” the old lady murmured, “but ’n’ doan’t now, ’n’ doan’t now.”

Fresh delight entered the hearts of the two girls. The idea of boys making love to Granny was too much for them.

"And did you have boys, Granny?" they asked, curiously.

Granny smiled and nodded and counted them up on her fingers. Then answered:

"Fahve—yes, fahve."

"Five! Oh, you flirt, Granny," Tilly laughed. "I would never have thought it of you."

Granny wagged her head in childish delight, and added:

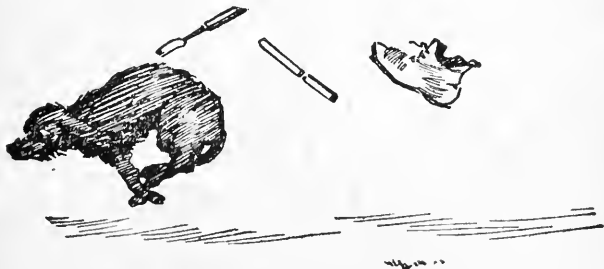
"But Ah only merried yun."

The girls went off again into shrieks, and Peter, throwing bread scraps at old John to attract his notice, cried:

"Father! Father! did you hear that? Granny had five chaps and only married one. Ha! ha! ha! ha! only married one."

"Well," answered old John as he held his wife by the shoulders, "Ah hed a girl for every Sunda' in th' year, an' only merried this yun." Then giving Mrs. Dashwood a parting squeeze went off to the yard.

"Father's a blooming caution," Peter said, as he reached for his hat and followed him.



CHAPTER II.

City Anticipations.

THE close of a Summer day.

Tea was over at "Fairfield." Polly and Tilly were in the drawing room searching for pieces to try on the piano. Old John, with a newspaper in his hands, was stretched on the couch in the dining room studying the prices of produce. Mrs. Dashwood sat at the sewing machine running up a suit for little Andy. In the workshed, outside, surrounded with lights, James worked steadily at a sulky he was building after his own heart. James was a mechanic—a genius in the line of machinery. No implement ever came to the farm but what he pulled to pieces and improved upon in some way or other. In a small, untidy room, off the front verandah, full of all manners of odds and ends from books and magazines to bullocks' horns and bean seeds, reclined Peter, his feet on the table, studying a magazine. Buried in a padded arm chair in the drawing room with her knees crossed, silently manipulating a set of knitting needles with rare dexterity, sat Granny talking to herself. At her feet sprawled little Andy, at intervals removing one of her slippers and fitting it on again.

"Ah sees maize be a pound a beg, Elahser," remarked old John, putting aside the newspaper and turning to his wife.

"A pound a bag! That's a lot, isn't it, Father?" she answered, taking up the scissors and snipping a thread.

"Ah-h; more'n it's been for a good few year."

"And will we have much this season, John?"—adjusting the cloth to her machine.

"Abaht 600 begs—may be more."

"That's very good, isn't it?" wheeling on her chair and facing her husband.

"Ah-h, it be then, when yow coomes to thenk how things wer' with us twenty year ago."

"Indeed yes!"—with a hint of sadness in her voice—"we could hardly make both ends meet then, John!"

"Very of'en us didn't, did us? But noothin' sooceeds lahke sooeess. In them days when us sold a crop, Elahser, we be as of'en as not in debt. Wert so? An' nah as theer's no much need to mahnd how thengs go, the mooney it rolls in bah the bushel."

Then taking pencil and paper old John went into calculations on the year's returns from maize, wheat, pigs, horses, cattle, etc.

"Abaht £1800 we be amakin' a-year, Elahser," he said, glancing up.

"£1800! So much as that! Why, you won't know what to do with it all soon, Father." And Mrs. Dashwood laughed pleasantly.

“Waint Ah but,” and old John fell into reflection.

Then, as he returned the pencil to his pocket:

“Well, we’s ’ll be all atakin’ a hahliday for one theng wi’ soome on it, Elahser. What abaht this trip to the city? If us don’t make it soon may be soome yun o’ us ’ll be trippin’ to ’tother sahde o’ th’ grave wi’out a return ticket.”

Feeling he had made rather a good joke old John began to chuckle.

“Oh, that will be splendid,” and Mrs. Dashwood’s eyes sparkled with the pleasure of anticipation. “The children will be pleased when they hear of it.”

“Ah baint be snre abaht it bein’ splendid,” and old John chuckled more. “Thet will derpend hah soome o’ us have kept th’ Commendments.”

Mrs. Dashwood saw the joke, and said with a smile:

“But I mean the trip to the city, John.”

“Ah-h, I knows,” old John replied kindly.

“And you’ll take Maria, too, won’t you, Father? (Maria was their married daughter.) She would be so glad to come, and it would do the baby a lot of good.”

“Take ’n? Whah not? Let ’n all coome. There be lots o’ room for ’n dahn there, an’ the more of ’em th’ merrier.”

The piano was heard to rumble and vibrate like the warning notes of an approaching thunderstorm.

“That’s Tilly!” Mrs. Dashwood said, assuming a listening attitude.

"Ah-h," rejoined the husband indifferently. Music was not one of his strong points.

Then the voice of Polly rang through the house as she began to sing full and sweet.

"One of the songs Tilly brought from the Grammar School," Mrs. Dashwood informed old John. "'Dear Orothong.' It's pretty, isn't it?"

"Ah-h," was the answer. "Ah-h. Them spiles they're singin' but, bah tin-kettlin' the words wi' the pianny the way un do. Thet wern't how as us used to give a song. Thet be neither oon thing or 'noother."

The front door of the drawing room was heard to burst open, and Peter, magazine in hand, unceremoniously intruded on the musical evening.

"Where's Father?" he shouted at the broad of Polly's back as she stood to the piano.

"Those mem-o-ries sweet and dear," poured from Polly.

"Where's *Father?*" louder than before from Peter

"He's a rum un, that fellow," said old John, with an amused chuckle.

"But he shouldn't interrupt them," Mrs. Dashwood said. Then calling from her place in the dining-room: "Peter! Peter!"

Polly reached the psychological moment in the song. She was taking a run of high notes. Her voice dwelt long and tenderly on the words: "Orothong! De-ar Oro-thong, will you for-r-r-get me!"

"*Forget* you! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter broke in. "Never! I couldn't, unless I lost my memory."

Polly ceased in the middle of her song, and turned and looked indignantly at her brother.

Tilly sprang from the piano stool.

"*Peter!*" she cried, "you silly angora! Go away. It's like your cheek to come in and interrupt."

"It's like your bad manners not to answer a civil question. Ha! ha! ha!" from Peter.

"A civil question!" Tilly echoed. "You should be answered like every other fool, according to your folly! You should be answered with a kick."

"Oh, Tilly!" from Polly, who was modest in all things.

"So he should—it's too good for him," the other insisted.

But Peter had no temper. No epithet could perturb him. Shoving his nose close to Tilly's flushed face, he bel-
lowed:

"WHERE'S FATHER!"

"Hear 'em agoin' at it," said old John, with another chuckle.

"How do I know," Tilly snapped, turning to the piano again. "In his skin I suppose."

"And when he jumps out I suppose you can jump in. Ha, Ha, Ha!" was the other's answer.

"He's in the dining room along with mother," Polly said quietly.

"Oh, well! why didn't you say so before?" And Peter,

with a broad grin, made a mock bow as he departed. At the door he turned, and lifting his voice to the roof sang in a most execrable key: "Oroth-th-th-thong, don't for-r-r-get me-e-e." The absurdity of the effort was too great even for his sisters. They both burst into laughter.

"What ded yow stop for, pet lambs?" Granny innocently inquired as she rattled on with her needles.

But the girls offered no explanation to Granny.

"Start it again, Polly," Tilly said, touching the keyboard.

Polly started the song again.

"Now what's your opinion of this, Father?" Peter, turning over the pages of the magazine commenced as he entered the dining room.

"What be it, lad?" said the parent.

"There's someone writing in this about different kinds of humour, and explaining what is humour, and what isn't humour; and he quotes this as a sample, or whatever you like to call it, of the best jokes that have made people laugh."

"Did it make thee laugh, lad?" interrupted the parent.

"It wouldn't make a cat laugh, Father, I reckon," answered Peter.

"Ah-h; then it baint be a good yun, Ah reckons. Read un aht." And old John, with confident, critical air, settled himself to listen and adjudge. In all points and questions of humour old John was the High Court and Privy Council of the Farm.

"Well, I can't read it all to you," Peter explained, "because there's a picture with it. There, see?" displaying Phil May's black and white sketch of an asylum wall with a man outside it, fishing in the river, and a warder on the wall watching the angler.

"Ah-h," remarked the parent, "thet be th' mad house, an' Ah sooppose th' joake it be a bit cracked."

"Just what it is. Ha, ha, ha! You've struck it, Father. Not bad, not bad. Ha, ha, ha!"

Old John accepted the compliment with one of his broadest smiles.

"Did you hear that one, Mother?" Peter asked enthusiastically of Mrs. Dashwood.

Mrs. Dashwood nodded and smiled at the great humorist.

"Doan't matter," said he. "Go on, read 'n aht."

Peter continued:

"The cove, the warder on the wall, says to the chap fishing: 'Gettin' any bites?' "

"Well, 'n what do 'e say?" inquired old John.

" 'None yet.' "

"Well," and old John shifted position so as to collect all his mental forces, "'n what then?"

"Then the cove on the wall sez——" Peter peered hard into the magazine.

"What 'n do 'e say?" the parent interrupted.

"Sez to him: 'How long have you been fishing?' "

"Hah long 'e been feshin'," repeated the other for his own benefit. Then to Peter:

"Be there any more?"

"The cove then sez," Peter went on, "'About three hours.'"

"Abaht three hours," old John repeated. "Abaht three hours." Then leaned back as if to solve the problem.

"Wait a bit, Father—that ain't all of it. This is where the joke is." And Peter prepared to read some more.

"Ah-h," said old John, "Ah thought summit wer' left aht," and he came to "attention" again.

"*'Come inside,'* the cove on the wall sez," and Peter looked up and grinned at his perplexed looking parent. "Did ever you hear such a joke?" he said, putting down the magazine.

Old John stroked his chin and pondered profoundly.

"Coomo insahd!" he muttered, staring up at the ceiling. "Coomo insahd! . . . Abaht three hours! . . . Coomo insahd!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Peter burst out. "Did ever you hear such a rotten thing?"

"Wait tho', wait tho', wait on," and old John leaned further back, and pressed his brow with his big palms.

"Come insahd," he mumbled once more.

"Come out of the wet, I suppose he meant," and Peter laughed in ridicule once more. Peter seemed anxious to

cajole the High Court into a hurried and impartial decision. But old John wasn't to be hustled.

"Yow've got 'n mixed wi' th' picture, lad," he said at last. "There be summit missin'. Read 'n all aht in one piece."

Peter took up the magazine again, and read quickly:

"Getting any bites?"

"None yet."

"How long have you been fishing?"

"About three hours."

"Come inside."

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared old John, jumping up. "O' course. Ho! ho! ho! Ho! ho! ho! It be a good joke. Don't 'n see it? Ho! ho! ho! Coome insahd."

Peter was perplexed.

His parent whacked him on the back with his big hand, and cheerfully delivered judgment:

"Coome insahd," he chuckled, "*an' get a fesh from 'th' ketchin' and put 'n on his lahne.*"

"Ha, ha, ha, *hah*," Peter broke out like a crack of lightning, and banging his knee with the flat of the magazine, yelled: "That's it, Father; that's it, and I'm hanged if I saw it! Ha, ha, ha! A good one it is too. Come inside! Ha ha, ha, ha, *hah*. Well, I'm blown."

"Oh, it be plain as a furrow," said old John, "plain as you like. Oh, yes. Coome insahd!" And he shook his head merrily.

Peter returned to the magazine and began to study the joke again.

"Can you see it, Mother?" he asked, grinning at Mrs. Dashwood.

"Oh yes," she answered with quiet indifference, "but I'm more interested in the trip to the city."

"Eh, what Mother?" Peter asked, pricking his ears quickly.

Mrs. Dashwood explained.

Peter forgot all about the joke in an instant.

"What?" he cried, "the whole lot of us for a month?"

His mother nodded.

Peter jumped over several chairs.

"Ah-h," old John confirmed. Then quoting the inscription on a post-card that had been going the rounds: "Th' whole dem family."

"John!" Mrs. Dashwood said reprovingly.

Peter rushed away to the drawing room, and shouted the glad news to his sisters.

They both deserted the piano.

"The city! All of us?" they cried, and flew to their parents for confirmation.

"Yes, your father is going to take us all," Mrs. Dashwood answered. And old John added:

"Ah-h, th' whole lot on y'."

"The whole dam family," Peter shouted, appropriating his parent's jest with a loud laugh.

Tilly was carried away with excitement. She ran to

her father, and pinched his ruddy cheeks, and called him her "dear old Father."

Old John made no demur. He smiled in enjoyment of it all.

"And when do we go, Mother?" Polly asked.

"As soon as we can get ready," was the answer.

Tilly wrung her hands.

"And it's the opera season," she cried. "We'll see an opera, Poll. The Gondoliers" (breaking into a lively air, and singing). "Oh, the beautiful Gondoliers." Then seizing hold of her sister, dancing fashion, she began swinging her round. Polly responded willingly, and around they careered like a whirlwind.

"Girls! be careful!" Mrs. Dashwood called as the furniture became endangered.

"Oh, hoh; them beautiful Gondoliers!" Peter shouted in imitation of Tilly, and grabbing a chair for a partner joined furiously in the waltze.

"Peter!" his mother protested, "*Peter!*"

"Oh, them beautiful Gondo——" Peter bumped heavily against his sisters, and his refrain was cut short. "Gondoliers," he continued, regaining his equilibrium and pursuing them.

Through the door and into the drawing room the girls twirled, where with a shriek Polly separated from her partner and dropped into a chair. But Tilly's delight knew no bounds. Taking a short grip of her skirts she cinematographed to a series of high kicks and cake walk.

Once she kicked over Granny's head: while Polly leaned back in her chair and shrieked.

Tilly's antics flooded Granny's memory with pleasures of the past. A youthful feeling took possession of her. Her eyes shone like stars and her head started to nod. Tilly kicked out in her vicinity again. Granny, half slipped, took the floor, and, catching the sides of her dress, faced Tilly in Irish jig style.

Polly threatened to injure herself somewhere with merriment. She wriggled and shrieked and shrieked and wriggled. Peter dropped his wooden partner on the what-not and applauded his grandmother. Then he yelled:

"Father! Father! Mother! for the love of me, look here! Ha! ha! ha! ha! *hah-h!*"

Old John and Mrs. Dashwood, amazed and amused-looking, came to the drawing room door, and gaped.

"Well Ah never!" gasped old John.

Forgetting all about her cramps and sore back, Granny laid to it.

Peter, with no more idea of music than a plough horse, rushed to the piano and banged it violently in the interests of Granny.

"Well, Ah never ded!" gasped old John again.

Little Andy raised himself up, and guffawed. Then he started out to create a part for himself in the play. He placed his head on the carpet and essayed to stand the wrong way up. "Hoh," he cried when his heels were in



GRANNY, HALF SLIPPERED, TOOK THE FLOOR.

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the air. Then he lost his bearings, and toppled over, and his legs fouled Granny and made trouble.

"Oh! Oh!" Polly cried, anticipating the catastrophe. The next moment Tilly and Granny and little Andy were all engaged in the "sacks on the mill" act.

Old John and Mrs. Dashwood became alarmed on the aged one's account, and hurried to her assistance.

"Oh, yer 'urtin' me," Andy squeaked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Peter laughed, when Granny was put back into her padded chair, "what did you think of the music?"

"Poor Granny!" Polly murmured. Then after a short giggle, "It was a shame!"

"And it was all *your* fault, you Handy Andy!" Tilly said, scowling upon the grinning culprit.

"Oh, she baint be hurt," old John assured them. "There be a lot o' kecks in her yet."

"I never thought she could dance at all," Tilly laughed.

"Oh, mah word," replied old John, with pride in eye. "She wer' a champion in her tahme. Yow should hear th' auld hands what know'd her in her yoong day atalk abaht her. Ah seed her maself oon naht knock oop three well sinkers an' two moosicians. Wert so, Mother?"

Mrs. Dashwood assured her daughters it was so.

"And what did they do with her then, Father?" Peter asked.

"Do?" answered his parent with a puzzled look, "wha, what 'd you do, lad?"

"I'd have put hobbles or a side-line on her. Ha, ha, ha."

Old John stared indignantly at his flippant son.

"Three partners!" Polly put in. "It must have been a competition, not a dance, Father."

"Call 'n what yow lahke," answered old John, "but she doon it."

There was an interruption. Granny suddenly broke out in a fresh place. Her thin, frail voice piped into song.

"Ha, ha, hah," came in greeting from Peter.

"Sh-sh-sh-sh," and old John held up his hand to silence Peter.

Polly giggled irresistably. Old John silenced her.

Peter discovered that Granny was singing without accompaniment. He sprang to the piano and struck a series of notes tenderly, and threw broad grins over his shoulder in the course of his performance. Then as Granny strained to raise her voice he put in a run of heavy punches that attracted attention.

Alarmed for the safety of the piano Tilly crossed the floor to reason with Peter.

"That be a rare old song o' her'n," old John, with beaming face, informed his family.

"Do you want to break it? Peter!" Tilly cried.

"Ah-h, a great auld song!" whispered old John, as Granny entered upon the second verse.

"Peter!" Tilly protested again. "Peter, do you hear?"

"Turn over—quick!" Peter shouted. "I'm a bar behind."

"You should be, too, you lunatic." And Tilly levered him by the coat collar.

Peter started to choke.

"S-s-s-stead-y!" he gasped.

Tilly released her grip, and bit him on the neck.

"Yow! mighty!" Peter yelled, jumping to his feet.

"Hoat! hoat!" from old John. "Doan't 'n mek sooch a nise!"

Peter stood, rubbing his neck, and grinning with pain.

Tilly closed the piano.

All eyes were turned to Granny. She was feebly reaching for some top notes. Polly, anticipating a breakdown, threw her voice in with Granny's.

Old John, holding one hand above the other, stood prepared to applaud his parent.

Up went Granny's voice. Up went Peter's.

"He like a sol-jeer fell!" he yelled.

"Oh loord!" cried old John, and with his hands to his ears, hurried back to the dining-room.

CHAPTER III.

Wheat-Loading Extraordinary.

MILLER'S traction engine with threshing plant in tow steamed out of the farm yard. It left behind it, where before had stood a gigantic bin of corn, some eight hundred sacks of the primest grain.

"This 'll take soome o' th' gravy oot on y', lad," remarked old John to Peter, as James, with horses and waggon in hand, drew up beside the pile.

Peter eyed the formidable-looking heap of weighty sacks, and grinned a sickly sort of grin. Peter remembered having assisted but a few months before in the loading of six hundred bags of wheat, and knew what the undertaking meant.

"Soome on 'em's a fair weight," the parent went on, pressing his fist against one of the sacks—"two oondred an' forty in most on 'em."

"It will be no joke putting them on the waggon," Peter observed, sadly, "and getting them into the barn won't be any easier. Couldn't a better way of handling them be invented than by bursting ourselves lifting them?"

"Well," old John drawled, "th' heasiest tahme Ah ever hed liftin' begs wer' a lot th' 'ardest, lad!"

"The hardest?" Peter said with a puzzled look. "That's a contradiction, isn't it, Father?"

"It baint then, for yer ses Ah never lifted 'n on at all for a coople o' year roomnin'." And old John laughed at his son.

"Well, some one else lifted them on for you?" suggested Peter.

"'N didn't," was the answer.

"Well, I'm blowed if it's clear to me, Father."

"It wer' pretty clear to me then, lad," said old John, grinning like a schoolmaster who has his pupil tied in a knot.

"Well, what the deuce did you get into the bad habit of lifting them on again for?" asked Peter.

"'Cause it raihned, lad; an' soome grew. There wer' a draht afore. See lad?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Peter. "Oh yes," he said. "Ha, ha, ha! I see, Father."

James backed the waggon into position, and old John, motioning Peter to "grip hands," took the nearest sack, and together they hoisted it into the waggon.

Peter puffed and grunted after the exertion.

"Doan't get 'n winded yet, lad," the parent counselled good humouredly, "there be aiht 'oondered on 'em."

Peter mentally wished the corn to Halifax.

"Nah then!" from old John, and with another grunt or two from Peter, up went No. 2 into the waggon.

"Pshaw! hold on a bit!" James called out, approach-

ing the waggon side with a spare horse and a long rope. "That's a blackfellow's way of loading them."

"A blackfeller's way!" said old John, surprised looking, "there baint be any yother thet Ah knows on."

"Oh yes there is, Father," James answered quietly, "just you lean that slide, there, up against the side of the waggon, and I'll show you."

Looking round, old John's eyes rested on a rough wooden frame that was new to him.

"Yon?" he said, pointing to it. "Ah wer' woonderin' what 'n wer' for!"

"I made it last night," James muttered, taking hold of the frame; and, while his parent and Peter stood staring in wonder, placed it in a slanting position against the waggon.

Old John shifted his gaze to the draught mare. Nugget, backed up to the opposite side, and started to chuckle.

"A bit o' horse-play, lad?" he asked.

"A bit of horse *power*, Father," James answered, flying round.

"Horse power! Ha, ha, ha! And Nugget's a *mare*," from Peter.

"Well, that (James tugged at the rope) is horse (another tug) *laughter*. And *you* ain't even a filly."

"Ho, ho, ho!" mumbled old John, looking at Peter, "thet be one agen thee, lad."

James adjusted the rope, and when he brought the loop over and "lassooed" a sack with it, Peter's eyes began to

open wide. James's idea of saving labour suddenly revealed itself to him, and he exclaimed: "I see it! Nugget 'll pull them all on, eh?"

"What else would you expect?" James grunted. "You don't think she'll pull them all off, do you?"

Then after a pause:

"Lead her on, and stop her when I sing out. That's all you've got to do—if you think you can do it."

"Do it!" Peter answered enthusiastically. "Ha! ha! ha! That's something like the way to load." And he went to the mare's head. Then turning to old John, whose face still manifested doubt in the project:

"Now, why didn't you invent something like that all these years, Father—eh? Ha! Ha! Ha! James is coming out of his shell a bit!"

"Wha did'n Ah think on it?" said old John mechanically.

"Now then," James interrupted, "if you jump up on the waggon, Father, and build the load, I'll look after this end of the business."

"Ah-h," and old John, like an unbeliever, slowly mounted the waggon.

"Right!" James called to Peter.

Peter led Nugget along, and up rolled a sack of corn on the end of the rope.

"Woh!" James called.

Peter "wohed," then backed the mare as was required of him.

James took the noose, adjusted it once more; called "right" again, and up went another sack.

"Wha, thet be a fahne idea," old John called out in approval, "what made 'n thenk o' it, lad?"

"Well, it was on Peter's account," James answered, with a grin. "I thought he might hurt himself throwing these bags about. He's such a tiger for work, you know."

"Ah-h, he looks lahke 'n," and old John smiled down upon Peter.

"I believe in making things as light as possible for myself," Peter chuckled back. "'Make your head save your back.' That's my motto, Father."

"Thee baint be a peek-pocket, then, lad," grunted o'd John as he placed a sack in position.

"Woh!" said Peter to the mare. Then to his parent: "Ain't a what, Father?" And he looked up at his parent. Peter never liked to miss anything that was said.

"A peek-pocket," repeated old John.

"Why—how, Father?" curiously.

"'Cause a peek-pocket believes in makin' things lahter for other people, thet's why."

Peter laughed in appreciation.

"Very good, Father, very good," he complimented. "That's not too bad."

"Right!" rang out from James.

Peter was slow to respond.

"Oh, don't be 'ha ha'n' there all day!" James shouted, "shake things up, can't you?"

Peter hustled a bit.

Then as the mare backed into position again he shouted:

"I hope we don't meet any of them jolly beggars of pick-pockets when we go to the city, Father."

"Us maht then, lad," was the answer. "There be plenty on 'em dahn there."

"*Right!*" in a peremptory tone of voice from James.

Peter performed his part, then yelled out:

"You won't catch me carrying money in any of my pockets, Father!"

"Noah," old John grunted back. Then after handling another sack: "Where 'll thee carry 'n then, lad?"

"Oh, I'll only keep half-sovereigns," Peter said, "and carry them in my mouth."

"A pity you hadn't a few to carry now," James put in, as he waited for his brother to move the mare.

"In yow're math, lad?" old John chuckled, "whah, yow'd swaller 'n. But Ah guess they'd be saife enoof, lad."

Peter began to laugh.

"Right! Right there!" James called angrily.

Peter attended to his part. James in his irritation omitted to call out "woh" at the critical moment. Peter's mind was intent on the city pick-pockets, and to stop the mare on his own account never occurred to him. He seemed to think the excursion to the city had already com-

menced, and that Nugget and himself were on their way to the railway station.

"Werp! werp!" old John protested excitedly, as the rolling sack tilted against his legs with some force, and showed no inclination to remain on top of the waggon. "Mah'nd! mahn'd!"

"Woh-h! woh-h!" James, seeing what must happen, called loudly. But it was too late. Nugget got in a stride or two too many, and hauled the sack and old John along with it right over the side of the waggon on to the ground.

"Look out! Look out!" James gasped. "Father 'll be killed!" And running round, he dragged the sack of corn from off his parent's chest.

"Are you hurt, Father?" he asked anxiously.

Old John pulled himself together, and laughed.

"Hurt?" he said, "not a bet, lad."

Old John was not a pampered individual. He was a tough old saw.

"Ha, ha, ha! ha! hah!" chirped Peter, when he saw his parent dusting chaff and dirt off himself. "I couldn't make out where you were off to, Father, when I saw you coming down head first."

"Well, Ah could, then!" old John replied feelingly, and dusted himself some more.

"And if you had been minding your work," James said, condemning Peter, "it couldn't have happened at all."

"Oh, it ain't to be helped, lads!" old John said, exone-

rating all concerned, "ahccidents 'll heppen—even in mah family." And he broke into another laugh.

"That was what you call a dispensation of Providence, eh, Father?" put in Peter.

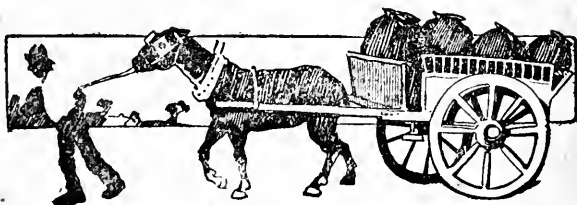
"Ah-h," and old John started to climb into the waggon again. "A despensation o' John Dashwood, Ah thenks," he added as he reached the top.

"If someone dispensed with him," meaning Peter, "I think we'd get on a lot better," James remarked cynically, as he took his place at the slide again.

James's valuation of Peter as a farm-hand was not a high one.

"Roll 'n up again, lads," the parent commanded cheerfully. "Abaht four more an' we'll have a load."

They rolled them up again. All day long those sacks of corn rolled on to the waggon, and when evening came the greater part of the eight hundred was safely housed in the barn.



CHAPTER IV.

An Unappreciated Present.

"I T woan't take 'n long fixin' th' rest to-morrow," old John observed thoughtfully, closing and bolting the heavy barn door that creaked on its rollers, "an' soon 's 'n be carted to th' railway then we's go to the city, lads."

"The city isn't worrying me much, Father," James answered indifferently. "I'd sooner put the time in completing my sulky."

"But 'n moost go, lad," the parent insisted. "The soolky can keep till 'n comes back."

"You wouldn't catch *me* staying behind, Father," Peter broke in. "Ha! ha! ha! I wouldn't stay behind for a hundred sulkies!"

"Noh, *thee* wouldn't, lad," his parent chuckled. "Thee be summit lahke a dug in thet respect, Peter."

"Ha, ha, ha; ha, *hah!*" roared Peter. "Yes, like old Tom, Father. He'll never stay behind, even if he's told to."

"Ah-h, lahke old Tom," old John agreed. "Lahke old Tom."

Then leading the way across the yard he attended to the rugging and feeding of the draught horses, while the sons saw to the wants of the cows and pigs.

It was then getting dusk.

"He be agoin' to grow to a fahne colt," old John said in admiration of a handsome draught yearling, placing his arms about the hairy quadruped's neck and fondling it.

"Ah thenk as Ah moit put 'n into th' Show next year."

"By Jove, yes," Peter approved with a giggle. "I would, if I were you, Father. Show him in James's sulky. It'll be finished in about another year. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Show *you* in James's sulky!" his brother growled in disapproval.

"*Me?*" and Peter laughed more. "You wouldn't get me in it," he added, "unless there was a certificate to say it was safe for a man to trust himself in it. Ha! ha! ha! What do you think, Father?"

"For a *man*," James said, "it would be safe enough—but I don't know about a *donkey*!"

Peter didn't laugh. He didn't see any occasion to.

"Well, Ah dersen't thenk Ah could get inte it, from the sahze on 't," the parent put in pleasantly.

Peter saw occasion to laugh now, and he did so vigorously.

"I don't think anyone could get into it. Father," he said. "James must be making it for a go-cart for little Andy. Ha! ha! ha! And he'll harness one of the *sheep* or old Tom in it for him."

Just then Polly and Tilly, who had been to the township, shopping and consulting the dressmaker there in regard to their outfit for the city, drove into the yard.

James stepped forward and helped his sisters to alight, and took charge of the horse.

"My word!" Peter cried, walking round the buggy in a lordly sort of way, "jolly nice time to come home. . . . And just look at poor old Whistler, sweating like a fool!"

"Well, we would much rather he sweated like a fool, Peter," Tilly answered, throwing back her veil and displaying a pair of rosy cheeks and an even set of white teeth, "than he should *talk* like one."

James, who always enjoyed Tilly's little digs at her brother, chuckled as he unbuckled the traces, and looked across to see how he was relishing it. But to Peter it was all water on a duck's back.

"It would look a deal better," he rattled on, "if the pair of you were in the shafts yourselves—tandem fashion. Ha, ha, ha! And old Whistler on the seat. What do you think, Father?"

Old John's eyes twinkled a lot; but he didn't make known his thoughts on the matter.

"Father couldn't be bothered thinking about anything so ridiculous," Tilly retorted, loading herself up with parcels taken from the buggy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" from Peter. "You're right. Anything more ridiculous than you two, no one could imagine."

Tilly, standing with arms encircling the brown paper parcels, frowned contemptuously at him.

"You're an incorrigible ass, Peter," she said, then burst out laughing.

Peter calmly lifted an empty pig bucket, greasy and dirty, that he had set on the ground some minutes before, and with a loud "Ha! ha! ha!" stood it on top of Tilly's parcels.

Tilly flew into a helpless and useless passion. She attempted to kick Peter, and called upon old John to do things to him.

The parent with a broad smile took possession of the greasy bucket and set it down.

"He shouldn't be allowed to do a thing like that, Father," Tilly stormed. "That's nothing funny!"

"Oh, let him alone, and come along, Tilly," Polly advised. "Mother will be all behind with the tea if we don't hurry."

"Yes," Peter shouted after them, as they hastened through the gate, "hurry up and do something, and let us have our tea. I want mine; and James wants to begin work. He's been loafing all day. Ha! ha! ha!"

Some porkers, squealing wildly, attracted old John.

"Ded 'n feed all th' pegs, lad?" he asked, turning to the sties.

"Feed them!" Peter answered. "I gave them all the separated milk, and enough boiled corn to do them a year. The more those wretches get the more they want."

"Thet be th' way wi' all pegs," old John remarked, peering over at a number of pure bred Berkshires.

Then after admiring them for a few moments:

"They be comin' on, them chaps, lad."

"Not as fast as they ought," Peter answered. Peter was in charge of the pig department on the farm, and had the interest of the swine at heart. "I'm going to try old Jimmy Winn's dodge on some of them, Father," he added, with a philanthropic smile.

"What be thet, lad?" inquired old John.

"Cut their tails off," said Peter.

Old John looked curiously at the chief of the pig department, and broke into a rumbling chuckle.

"Cut 'n tails off?" he echoed, "what—to make 'n sharter?"

"To make them grow," said the other. "And while I think of it," he continued, "I'll begin on a couple now."

Away he trotted to the tool-house; and with a fresh smile on his face, returned carrying a pair of gaping hedge-clippers in his hands, the blades of which repeatedly snapped together like the jaws of a shark closing upon space.

"What! wi' yon things?" from old John in astonishment.

"Ha! ha! *hah!*" Peter laughed, slicing more of the atmosphere with the murderous looking implement. "These ought to do the trick, eh, Father?"

"Better take 'n a knahfe, lad," the parent advised, producing his own and opening the large blade.

"No fear. This is the very thing—just you watch." And with the clippers agape Peter leaned across the sty rails. "Watch now!" he urged a second time.

Old John, with a grin, watched.

A half-grown hog wandered up, nosed the clippers inquisitively, then grunted and turned his tail to them. Peter choked back a giggle. His hands trembled. Then "klang" went the blades, and off went that pig with a deafening squeal, and with the clippers dangling and jangling behind it.

"Ha, ha, ha! Blow it!" cried Peter. "They lapped."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed old John. "Thee will have to step in an' get 'n back now, lad."

"Tea, Father! Tea! Come ter tea, Father!" called little Andy, swinging himself to and fro on the garden gate.

"All raht, mah boy," old John answered back.

"Tea! Tea! Tea, Father!" came from little Andy again.

And leaving Peter in the sties fighting with the squealing swine for possession of the hedge clippers, the parent made his way to the house to tidy himself and prepare to preside over the evening meal.

Mrs. Dashwood, Granny, James, and Tilly filed in and took their places. Polly, with a long white apron over her dress, flew in and out the kitchen with the various dishes.

"We're all behind to-night, Father," Mrs. Dashwood said apologetically. "It's easily known the girls have been out to-day."

"All behahnd lahke th' cow's tail, moother." and old John squeezed his bulky form into its chair, and proceeded to rattle the carver on the steel.

Having finished carving he put down the knife and fork and nodded to Granny.

Granny placed a hand over her forehead and prattled off a long and incoherent grace, to which old John and Mrs. Dashwood added a reverent "Amen."

"Oh dear!" Tilly sighed, "I think Granny repeats the whole of the New Testament. Pass the salt, if you please, Father."

Then with the rattle of cutlery and crockery, mingled with cheerful speech and laughter, the meal went merrily on.

"Whatever is keeping Peter?" Mrs. Dashwood enquired, noting the prolonged absence of the cheerful one from the family board.

Old John thought of the hedge clippers, and raised a chuckle on his own account.

"I heard him going to his room a minute ago, Mother," Tilly said, "but he'll be another hour yet. Peter takes as long to tidy himself for tea as it takes some brides to dress for their wedding."

"I think we'll be a good while getting ready for ours," Polly said with a laugh.

"Indeed!" Tilly answered, "speak for yourself, Poll, I don't intend to be an old maid."

"He parts his hair in the centre now," James remarked, reverting to the absent Peter with a grin.

"Ah-h," said old John, digging deep into the butter, "Ah notice he be adoin' thet."

"Yes, and it makes him look quite a ninny," Tilly added with a laugh. "A man who parts his hair in the centre is a weakling always, I think."

"It baint be every man as can, mah girl," and old John, smiling hugely, passed his palm over the smooth surface of his bald crown.

The family laughed merrily.

"What they be alaughin' on?" Granny innocently asked of Tilly.

"We're all laughing because Father can't part his hair in the centre, Granny," Tilly informed her.

"Swengin' partners in the centre?" said Granny, and caused a fresh burst of merriment.

"Swinging partners in the centre!" murmured James, with an amused look on his face.

Just then Peter put in an appearance, wearing a new necktie of many colours, and a large smile, and in his hand he carried a dainty looking board box fastened with ribbon.

"I'll bet none of you can guess what's in this," he began, holding up the box to view.

"Oh, some one has sent him a valentine," Tilly hazarded.

Peter shook his head and grinned.

Every one stared curiously at the box, which he kept well out of reach.

"A box of pocket handkerchiefs from his girl," said Polly.

"What do you call those things they buy for kiddies?" suggested James, looking at his sire.

"A *dummy*," Tilly broke in with a laugh, "and just what he wants."

"Show me!" Polly cried, making a snatch at the box.

But Peter avoided her.

"Pshaw! he has nothing!" Tilly said, and curiosity threatened to peter out.

"It wasn't meant for me, anyway," Peter remarked adroitly.

Their curiosity went up again with a bound.

"Oh, it's something for *me*—it was addressed to *me*, and he's taken it!" Tilly cried in alarm. "It was sent from the school. Give it up, Peter, if it isn't for you!" and rising from the table made frantic efforts to gain possession of the valuable.

"Ha! ha! ha! You're pretty near it," Peter laughed, "but you're not quite right."

"It *is* for me. I know by the way he's going on," Tilly insisted in despairing tones. "It's something from Mary St. Clair. Make him give it up, Father!"

"Guess again, first," from Peter.

"Ah *do*, Peter!" Tilly resorted to tact, "and I'll never

say anything to offend you again. Ah, Peter! you know how I've always loved you as a sister? Peter!"

"Isn't she a hypocrite!" from Polly.

"Just let me peep at the address," and Tilly lifted her eyes pleadingly to her brother's.

"Well then, sit down, and you can have it," Peter consented.

Tilly, smiling triumphantly, sat down again, in a hurry.

Peter placed the coveted packet before her, then stood by winking at old John.

Polly made movement to assist her sister in the opening process. But Tilly would have no hands other than her own touch the precious packet. Tilly was a selfish girl where presents were concerned.

"I don't know the writing," she said, "but it is sent to me."

Peter winked again.

"Someone be asendin' of yow summit to wear to the city," suggested old John roguishly.

"Oh, I hope it is," and Tilly jerked the lid off. The next moment she dropped it all on the table with a shudder, and gasped:

"Oh, you beast!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Hah! ha! ha! hah!" And Peter danced a war-dance round the table.

Polly looked over Tilly's shoulder, and cried "Hugh!" Then burst into laughter.

"What be it?" asked old John.

"Just what you thought, Father," Peter choked. "Something for her to wear to the city. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Show 'n to us," and old John reached out his hand.

"Throw it out; the horrible thing!" and Tilly shoved away from it as though it would bite her.

Peter dipped in two fingers and lifted the contents of the box.

"He! he! he!" cried little Andy. "A pig's tail."

"Take 'n away, lad! take 'n away!" commanded old John, holding up both his hands.

Mrs. Dashwood was horrified.

"Peter," she cried, "how dare you!"

"A filthy jest—bringing such a thing to the tea table!" Tilly protested, renewing her attack on Peter.

"But you're going to wear it to the city, ain't you? Ha! ha! ha!" And Peter dangled the amputated member close to her ear.

Tilly bounced up in a tearing passion.

"Father!" she cried, "do you allow that?"

"Lad!" old John thundered in a voice that meant obedience.

"Well, give me back its coffin," Peter said, grinning as he collected the card board. "I'm going to bury it."

"And I do believe," Tilly broke out again, "he actually cut it off one of the poor little pigs!"

"Did you think I cut it off one of the old roosters?"

Ha, ha, ha!" and Peter went off cheerfully, to dispose of the trophy.

"Well, next Monda'," said old John, rising from the table, "we'll be amakin' a start for the city."

"Next Monday?" Tilly echoed jubilantly.

"Next Monday?" Polly cried.

"Ah-h, next Monda'." And old John reached for his pipe.



CHAPTER V.

The Tail of the Shirt.

A BRIGHT and cheerful morning. The fruit trees, and the hawthorn hedges that ornamented the farm lands were all in bloom. A warm and glorious sunshine lit up the land. The fields of waving wheat breaking and bulging into shot-blade were pictures good for man to see. The great pine trees towering round the snug home were asong with birds.

Full charge and control of "Fairfield" for the next month were handed over to William McStay, and all the family were up to their eyes in the final preparations for the trip to the city. The mail train on which they would travel was timed to leave the local station at 3.30 p.m., and it was now getting on for 11 o'clock.

For a week and more Mrs. Dashwood and the girls had been overhauling and organising their wardrobes, and packing boxes and bags and portmanteaux, so that no hitch would happen and no time be lost when the hour for starting arrived. And Tilly, who had had more experience in travelling than the others, was careful to send Maria (her married sister), full instructions to do likewise, and warned her to leave nothing to the last. And Maria sent a message to say that she and baby were ready to start any moment.

Preparations for celebrating a church picnic, or for attending a race meeting, are exciting enough events in the country, but this trip to the city excelled all things in the history of Fairfield. Nothing had ever so disorganised and dislocated the family nerve and general placidity. No matter how saintly, how well bred and brought up, there is no class upon earth so easily and speedily demoralised as the country person when under the spell and influence of "a trip to the city." But the demoralisation lasts only till their feet touch the floor of the railway carriage, and they feel a grip of the "ticket" and the carriage window. Then with a gulp and a gasp the temporary disorder passes away like the evil effects of green lucerne leaving a blown cow when proper remedies are applied.

"Moother!" called old John, showing himself at the door of his bedroom with a flannel shirt in his hand, "Moother!"

Mrs. Dashwood failed to hear him. She was engaged with Polly and Tilly in their private quarters, through the walls of which came peals of laughter, mingled with charges and counter charges, positive statements and blank denials. According to Tilly, Polly had "taken away her hair brush." According to Polly, Tilly had appropriated a box of her hair pins. According to each of them, both these statements were fabrications.

Old John lifted his voice and called "Moother" a tone or two higher.

Peter, with nothing on but his trousers, came out of the

bath, and, wishing to reach his room off the verandah by the quickest route, made a bold dash along the corridor. He encountered his parent.

"Helloah!" cried old John, "where be your Moother, lad?"

Peter slowed down.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed. "Ain't you getting ready yet, Father?"

"Not yit," was the answer. "Your Moother wer' to put a pockit insahde this flannel for me to put mah money in, but (turning the shirt over in his hands), Ah don't see as she doon it."

"I made a little canvas bag to put mine in," Peter jubilantly informed his parent, then hurried off. At the front door he stopped and looked back.

"By Jove, you better hurry up, Father," he shouted, "it'll soon be getting time."

"Ah-h!" groaned old John.

Tilly, vigorously using a clothes brush on a garment hung over her arm, came from her room, and at the top of her voice desired to know if "anyone could see Maria coming."

"William sez she'll be acomin' any minet now," old John answered. "But wher' be your Moother?" he added. "There baint be a pockit in this 'ere flannel."

"Mother is coming in a second—as soon as she fixes Granny up," Tilly answered. Then, putting aside the

clothes brush, she volunteered to attend her parent's troubles, and inquired what they were.

Once more old John explained.

"Oh, dear me!" Tilly winced. "I heard her say yesterday she was going to do that! And look at the time it is now! Oh, give it to me, Father, and let me see what I can do! It's just terrible the way everything has been left to the last moment after all that was said."

"Well, Ah wants it put on so thet Ah won't lose any money out on't," old John stipulated as he handed over the garment.

Tilly almost snapped the shirt from him, and hurriedly went to the machine with it.

"And Ah wants a couple o' departments med in 't lahke," old John added.

Tilly frowned, and looked confused.

"You want a division made in it, Father—a stitch put through the centre of the pocket?" she said.

"Ah-h; lahke a cartridge belt," and old John withdrew to his room to continue his toilet.

"I'm blest if I know now how he means!" Tilly mumbled irritably. Then after fumbling the garment impatiently, started the machine full speed ahead.

Meanwhile trouble overtook Peter, and from the depths of his distant bedchamber he began yelling for first aid. And when Peter began to yell for anything he made no mistake about it. He subsidised his voice by attacking the wall with a heavy piece of scrap-iron. Eventually tiring of all

this he flung open the door of his room and rushed into the dining room and discovered Tilly.

"Is every one deaf in this house?" he demanded.

Tilly ignored him. Peter was nothing to Tilly just then.

"Where's my new suit gone?" he shouted.

Mrs. Dashwood, with Granny done up like a rainbow and hobbling after her, appeared on the scene.

"Your suit is in your drawers, Peter," she informed him.

"It's not, Mother," he answered, with tears of distress in his eyes.

Apprehensive of some blunder, Mrs. Dashwood hastened away to make investigations.

Peter followed at her heels.

"Isn't Maria coming yet, Tilly?" Polly called from the secret depths of her quarters. But Tilly had no ear for her sister, either. Tilly was studying the position of that pocket.

Mrs. Dashwood returned, after having placed Peter in possession of his suit.

"What are you doing, girl?" she asked, addressing Tilly.

"Oh, you get ready, Mother!" Tilly answered. "We forgot to put a pocket in this shirt for Father."

Mrs. Dashwood was taken by surprise.

"But I *put* it in," she said, confidently—and proceeded to examine the shirt.

"No, it's not there!" Tilly assured her.

"Curious!" Mrs. Dashwood murmured.

"It doesn't matter; it's nearly done now. Run away, Mother, and hurry, do! We'll be late, as sure as anything."

Mrs. Dashwood still puzzled her head over the pocket, while Tilly rose and tossed the shirt through the door to her Father.

Peter rushed in again.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he roared. "What game is this? Who the deuce put a pocket inside my shirt?"

"Ah! there you are!" Mrs. Dashwood said with a sigh of satisfaction. "I knew I had put a pocket in somewhere."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Not a bad joke, Mother," Peter went on, "to put it upside down! So as the money would go down a fellow's leg, eh?"

Mrs. Dashwood was sure it couldn't be upside down.

"Oh well, never mind; run away, Mother," Tilly urged, and Mrs. Dashwood was about to turn away when old John's voice, starting to rumble, rose to loud laughter.

"What's up with you, Father?" Peter called through the wall. "Is yours put on upside down, too! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Tilly looked at her mother and turned crimson and became bewildered looking.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!" and old John showed himself at the room door with the flannel in his hand again.

"Noh, it ain't oopsahd down, lad," he said, "but it be on the tail o' it. Hoh, Hoh, Hoh!"

"Ha, Ha! Hah, Hah, Hah!" Peter yelled, stamping about. Hah, Hah, Hah! You don't mean it, F'ather?"

"Doan't mean it? Look 'n at it," and old John held up the long end of the garment.

"Ha, Ha, Hah!" Peter went off again, while Tilly, casting one withering look at the fatal work of art, fled.

"Oh, dear me!" Mrs. Dashwood moaned, "everything does seem to go wrong."

"By Jove, they'll never pick that pocket on you, Father," Peter cried, hastening away again.

"Nevers you mahn'd it, Moother," old John said quietly, "may be it 'll do better thet way than 'tother."

"Well, I can't do anything to it now, John," and Mrs. Dashwood went off to prepare herself for the trip.

"I think I can see Maria coming," Polly was heard to call out, and Tilly answered:

"Oh, at last; and it's nearly time!"

"Do 'em say th' train be comin'?" Granny, having caught some of Polly's announcement, asked.

"No, it's *Maria*," Tilly informed her.

"Maguire?" repeated Granny. "Is Tom Maguire going in the train, too?"

Peter interrupted. A brilliant idea had occurred to him, and he rushed in to impart it to old John.

"Do you kuow what you should do, F'ather?" he shouted.

“Ah dersent want emmerthin’ more to do just now, lad,” came the answer. “If Ah gits this ’ere stood boot-toned (a grunt) Ah’ll do well enoof for one day.”

“I mean about that pocket in your shirt,” and Peter began to giggle.

“Ah-h, oh-h, thet. What abaht ’n, lad?”

“Well, if I were you I’d tie the sleeves around my waist, and wear the tail at my neck.” And Peter broke into a loud laugh at the lovely vision his words conveyed to him.

“Ah-h, an’ be awearin’ th’ pocket oopsahde down,” old John called back. “Thet waint be any use, lad.”

At this stage Maria, gorgeously dressed, and perspiring and carrying the baby in her arms, arrived.

“Oh,” she gasped, “it’s fearful warm!”

Peter greeted her with clamour and noise sufficient to arrest a swarm of bees; and the baby, taking fright at him, and starting to yell its lungs out, announced its arrival to the whole household.

“There’s Maria!” Tilly called.

“Maria’s come!” Mrs. Dashwood shouted. And old John, poking out his head, hailed her with:

“Hello, Maria. You be ahead on us. Have you got all your traps aready?”

“Yes; but I’ve forgotten my basket,” Maria answered excitedly. “And baby has lost one of his little shoes somewhere on the road. And I don’t know what on earth to do about it.”

“Ah-h,” thoughtfully from old John.

Granny hobbled in and embraced the bellowing infant and frightened it more.

“I forgot my basket, Granny, and don’t know what to do about it!” Maria moaned, appealing to the aged one.

“Oh yes, dear, Ah’m goin’ too,” Granny answered with a smile that disclosed her gums.

“We be all agoin’, mah girl.”

Mrs. Dashwood called loudly to Maria to come to her room.

Maria, hugging her squawking progeny to silence it, hastened thither, all the while repeating her woes of the absent basket.

“There you are—I thought she would!” Tilly called to Polly. “Maria has forgotten her basket!”

But Polly exercised discretion, while old John, arrayed in shining black suit with a heavy gold chain stretched across his great stomach, strutted into the dining room and surveyed himself in a self-satisfied sort of way. A big man was old John, and done up and posing as he was now, looked all over a prosperous alderman.

Granny in a motherly way looked him up and down, then took him in charge, and tugged at the sleeves and tails of his coat to coax them into position. Then taking out her pocket handkerchief she proceeded to dust him all over.

“Ah reckons as thet ’ll abaht do, Granny,” and old John moved round the room in further contemplation of himself.

“An’ Ah thenk Ah ought to look lahke as Ah coomed aht o’ th’ stable when Ah gets dahn there. They waint know I from the Governor.”

Little Andy, buried deep in a new suit, and gazing down in admiration of his polished boots, strolled along, and applied to his parent for “a shillin’.”

“A shellin’,” and from his trouser-pocket old John produced a large leather purse, bulged out like a clothes bag, and started fumbling the contents.

“Ah don’t thenk as Ah has a shellin’ for you, with aht Ah gives you haf-a-crahn.”

“No, you promised me a shillin’,” Andy protested, “an’ you’ll have to give it to me, see?”

And Andy seized his father round both knees as if to imprison him till he paid the debt.

“When we gets to the station, then, mah boy,” old John promised, “Ah’ll get you one.” And he returned the huge purse to his breast pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

The Trials of Travel.

PETER, dressed like a shop window, in a loud check suit, a cunning-looking tweed hat—the only one of its kind in the land—a high-coloured collar, a variegated necktie, and carrying a spanking new leather bag in each hand, skipped breezily into the room.

For a moment old John's breath threatened to leave him. He stared long and hard at his artistic-looking son. Peter paraded the room as if for inspection. Old John started to smile. Peter, lifting his voice in song to an excruciating key, bellowed:

“And I'm off to-o-o-o Philadelphia in th' mor-nin'.”

“Well,” said old John, “if Ah wouldn't ha' thought you was just come back from Heaven.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! How do you like me, Father?” Peter answered, placing the bags on the table, and hooking his thumbs into his vest coat. They won't take me for a Johnny from the wire fence. How do you think I'll strike them, Father?”

“Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!” old John laughed. “You'll strahke strips off 'em, lad—strahke it off lahke lightning.”

"By Joves, then, Father," Peter rejoined enthusiastically, "you don't look too bad yourself. You'd pass for a king in those clothes."

"Ah-h," drawled the parent.

James, carelessly dressed in a common tweed suit, and wearing a soft felt hat, sauntered in in search of luggage to convey to the buggies standing in the yard. His eyes rested on Peter, and he stopped abruptly, and stared.

Peter met his brother's look of amazement with a "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Old John, looking at James, said:

"Don't 'n know him, lad? Did 'n think he wer' th' Dook o' York?"

James burst into merriment, and turning on his heel retreated down the corridor. The next moment he was heard calling to the girls.

"What is it, James?" Tilly answered. "We'll be ready now in a moment."

"For heaven's sake," James said, "just go and look in at the dining room."

Neither Tilly nor Polly could resist curiosity. Clad in their sombre travelling dresses they hurried to the dining room and looked in curiously and expectantly. For a second or two they experienced disappointment, for their eyes only rested on the forms of Granny and old John. When, however, the gorgeous and smiling figure of Peter standing rigid and erect took shape to them they simultaneously shrieked, and fled.

"They be alaughin' at you, lad," old John remarked with a grin at Peter.

"Those who laugh last, Father, laugh longest," Peter said. "Wait till we get to the city, and see who'll be laughed at then—not me. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Mrs. Dashwood and Maria and the baby assembled in the dining room and dumped a consignment of small luggage on the table.

"Did anyone go for Maria's basket?" Mrs. Dashwood asked.

But Maria, herself, stifled a reply.

"Oh my, *Peter!*" she exclaimed on beholding her brother. Then she started to laugh.

"Well I'm blowed if I know what you all see wrong about me to laugh at," Peter protested. "Ain't I decent? Ain't I respectable looking?" And once more he stepped out round the room on a gallant parade.

"Ah don't know what there's wrong abaht you, lad," old John remarked cheerfully, "but Ah'm hanged if Ah can stop smiling at yow all th' sem."

"Really," Maria said advisedly, "you don't show a bit of taste, Peter! Not a bit."

"Don't show a bit of *taste?*" Peter echoed. Then turning to his parent: "There's a good joke there somewhere, Father, but I'm blest if I can get it off my tongue."

Peter scratched his head and pondered.

Old John supplied the joke.

"Well, Ah sooppose," he drawled, "thet yer baint old enoof to *taste*, lad."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! that's it," Peter yelled. "You take the bun, Father, you do."

"And you don't take anything," the parent added with a beaming smile.

"*I* don't?" and Peter looked perplexed.

This latest effort of his parent's was too subtle for him.

"Well," explained old John, "if yow don't *taste* any yow don't *take* any, do yow?"

Peter went off into a loud shriek.

"By crikey, Father!" he cried, "if there's any one down in the city who can make better jokes than you, they'll be pretty good at it."

James, who had returned quietly to the room, started to grin.

"If there's a better joke there than himself," he remarked slyly to Maria, "I'll be very much surprised."

Maria, casting another amused look at Peter, blushed for his sake, and replied:

"Did you *ever*?"

"No I *never*," James answered, and taking possession of some bags went off to the buggies with them.

"Well now, let me see," mused old John, thoughtfully. "There's noothin' else, Ah don't think. William and the boy knows what to do abaht the mares. Honest Jim, he'll cecme rahnd on Moonda'. King William on Toosda' follow-

in', an' thet horse o' McFalty's on Wednesda'. Ah spoke wi' them this mornin', so they knows all abaht thet lot."

"How did you manage about your pocket, Father?" Peter inquired. "I've a small bag sewn round me, here (tapping himself about the kidneys). There's six sovereigns there, and the cove who gets them out without me knowing all about it will be a pretty smart chap."

"Ah-h," old John answered, with regret in his voice, "thet's one thing should 'a' been looked to! But Ah'll menage. Ah sooppose!"

William appeared, and announced that everything was ready and advised them all to "get a move on."

There was fresh excitement then, and a great hurry-flurry.

Polly and Tilly with their hats in their hands paid final visits to the mirror.

Maria's baby broke out in a new place, and with such violence that its mother was compelled to claim a minute while she sat to search the infant's undergarments for the presence of a pin that she was "sure was sticking in it."

Granny put up a hue and cry about the loss of one of her woollen "mits" that all the while was in her pocket, and started the others off on a wild goose chase.

Old John was unable to put his hand on his hard felt "nail can" hat, and another expedition set out in search of it.

"Now then for the city," Peter cried, lifting his hand and adjusting his quaint little hat.

"Oh, wait just a minute!" Polly exclaimed excitedly. "What on earth did I do with my umbrella?"

They turned the place upside down in search of the umbrella, and eventually discovered that Granny was nursing it all the while.

"Don't forget my shillin', Father," Andy reminded his parent.

"Ah-h. I doan't thenk as Ah'll be allowed to," said old John.

"Now look after Gran'mother, some of you," Mrs. Dashwood advised, pulling on her gloves. "And what about the keys?"

Polly said all the keys were on the dresser where William could get them.

"Be yow all ready now?" in a loud voice from old John.

Everyone was silent.

"Then coome on," and old John, leading the way, marched out.

Out in the sun Polly and Tilly tittered, and said: "Just look at Peter!"

Then they clamoured and climbed into the four wheelers. James opened and closed the big white gate. The whips cracked and away they rolled to the railway station.

A sharp twenty minutes' drive past McFlaherty's farm, around Catherton's corner, and they reached the station.

The bulk of the luggage, which had proceeded them on Smith's waggon, occupied a whole end of the platform, and

the station master and his porter were busily engaged disfiguring it all with labels.

The station master raised his cap to the ladies, all of whom smiled graciously upon him, and passed pleasant remarks to old John on his appearance, and expressed envy at his freedom and his prospects of a good time in the city.

"Ah-h: Ah be agoin' to enjy meself, Johnson," old John assured him. "It be the first trip we've ataken, an' we're agoin' to do it in stahle."

"I don't blame you," the station master said. "I would too, if I were in your shoes."

Then turning with a grin to Peter:

"Peter looks as if he is going to have a good time, Mr. Dashwood?"

With a "Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter spun round three times on one heel.

"Ah-h," said old John with a smile, "Peter thinks he be agoin' to take th' city bah storm."

"I don't know about taking the *city* by storm," the cheerful station master answered, "but he might take some of the city girls by storm."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" and Peter made several revolutions on his other heel.

"He maht take them be th' *harm*," old John suggested wickedly, and both joined in a laugh at Peter.

Then the station master, glancing towards the ladies to see they were not within hearing, placed his mouth close to old John's ear and said something confidential.



"PETER THINKS HE BE AGOIN' TO TAKE TH' CITY BAH STORM."

On An Australian Farm

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"Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" old John burst. "Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" And a number of bystanders, residents of the district, who were there for "the mail" or to consign goods and one thing and another, were forced to join in the joke, though they hadn't the least idea what it was about.

"I wonder what on earth Father is laughing at?" Polly asked with an amused look on her face.

"I wonder!" Mrs. Dashwood smiling across at the cheerful red face of her husband.

"Goodness only knows what it is," Tilly put in. "Father and Mr. Johnson are always joking about something or other."

"Ah doan't thenk as he would go thet far," roared old John when he recovered his breath.

"Then he's a lot different to what his father was at his age, I bet," the station master replied, and old John broke into another loud "Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" in which the bystanders joined heartily.

Then, with a parting "Ha! Ha! Hah!" the station master turned and entered his office.

"Look 'ere, Johnson," old John called after him, "Ah'll have you dismissed at headquarters, when Ah gets to th' city."

Meanwhile Mrs. Dashwood and Maria and the girls were busy swapping and changing and arranging the smaller items of luggage. Polly required a certain bag

taken into the carriage, and Tilly a particular box, while Mrs. Dashwood and Maria expressed grave doubts as to the safety of a trunk in the van.

"Wherever did that come from?" Tilly exclaimed, observing the porter in the act of gumming a label to a tea tin. "That isn't ours."

The porter was thrown in doubt. "I thought it belonged to this lot," he said, looking from one to the other.

"Oh, that's *mine*," Maria said, coming forward and claiming the curiosity. "I have the baby's things in that." And more than the suggestion of a blush came into Maria's face.

Tilly glanced meaningly at Polly, then looked away and turned up her nose. Tilly was not in favour of travelling to the city in company with a tea tin.

"There were plenty of spare bags at the house, Maria, if we had known," Polly ventured quietly.

The baby broke into a whine again, and irritated Maria.

"Oh, it's grand enough for me," she snapped, shaking the infant up and down. "I've had to use a lot worse before—and so have other people!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Mrs. Dashwood said conciliatingly, "it doesn't matter!"

"Put it in with Peter," the porter suggested imprudently. "He looks like a 'commercial,' and they'll think he's travelling for tea."

Polly and Tilly at first blushed at this suggestion; then they broke into a giggle and walked up the platform.

"All travelling first, Mr. Dashwood?" the station master inquired, as he procured the tickets.

"Ah-h, all first," old John answered, taking out his purse.

"What about Peter?" and the official smiled significantly.

"Peter?" answered old John, turning and eyeing the magnificently dressed one, "Ah-h. But yow haven't enner-thin' better 'n first. have yow, Johnson?"

"Not here," the other answered, prodding the tickets into the date stamp. "But I dare say we could get the Governor's carriage if we wired right away."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter went off. "I'd look as well in it as old thing-a-me-bob the Lieutenant Governor."

"You'd look a jolly sight better, if you ask me," and the station master broke into a chuckle.

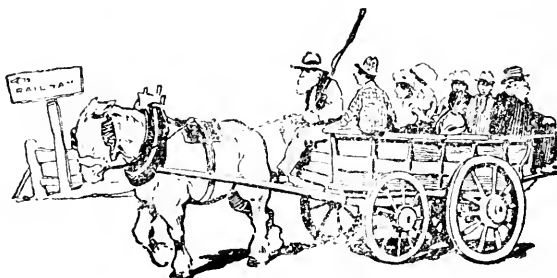
"He'd look better in that dog-box," James drawled, gazing out at an empty standing in the railway yard.

Just then the mail whistled, and a scramble set in.

"That's her," the station master cried, and rushed out.

Old John and James and Peter snapped up articles of luggage. William kissed Maria and the baby and said "good-bye" to the others. The train drew up to the platform, and one after the other the family crowded noisily into it, much to the annoyance and discomfiture of two com-

mercials, who lay full stretch on the seats. The station master banged the door after them, then stood on the carriage step and wished them all a good time and a safe return. Old John and James waved to those on the platform. The train whistled, puffed, strained, and went off.



CHAPTER VII.

On the Train.

THE train in full motion tore along on her course, rattling and roaring over bridges and culverts. Calico tents, camps, navvies' homes, mountains, and timber land were flung behind one upon another, and at every "gate" and every siding a whirlpool of dust and dead leaves rose in her wake.

"By Jove, this is all right, eh, Father?" Peter, standing with a firm grip of the carriage window, shouted joyfully.

Mrs. Dashwood began to exhibit symptoms of fear.

"I hope nothing goes wrong!" she cried nervously.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled. "Mother thinks we'll go off the line!"

"It maht then," said old John, smiling blandly in the corner that he had appropriated to himself. "It waint be th' first tahne she went off on this lahne."

"Oh, Father, how could it!" from Polly.

"Of course it could go off!" Mrs. Dashwood assured her daughters, her eyes widening with increased alarm.

"Well, if she does," James remarked philosophically, "there won't be many of us left to tell the tale."

"Oh, Oh," came from Mrs. Dashwood in gasps, as the train made a bit of a lurch.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" from Peter.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" laughed old John. "Doan't be frahtent fer a train, Elahser! Look theer at Granny—she dersent mahn'd 'n."

Granny, contentedly munching biscuits, and gazing out on a vast stretch of rich plain land, that lay in view, looked as though she had been reared in a train.

At that moment the carriage rocked violently as she swung round a curve, and only old John and James seemed to have been prepared for it. The others thought they had reached the end of the world, and that their time had come. Several short screams escaped the women, and they clutched at each other for support and salvation.

Peter, who lost all his balance, was thrown sideways into old John's lap.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" Mrs. Dashwood meaned on realising that all was yet well, "I thought we were gone!"

The girls and Maria, recovering, laughed hysterically at their own foolishness.

Peter gathered himself together, and with a forced "Ha! Ha! Ha!" courageously took his place at the window again.

"By Jove!" he cried, "it's great sport trying to hang on here."

The two commercials who had exiled themselves and their belongings to the furthestmost part of the carriage lay

quietly smiling at all the fuss and fears of their travelling companions. Occasionally they lifted a magazine and appeared to be deeply engrossed in its contents. But they were frauds and shams, those commercials. They read not a line. They used the magazines as barricades, behind which they closely observed the actions of Polly and Tilly and the rest—but more especially Polly and Tilly. At intervals they would say things to each other and smile.

“*They* haven’t seen many trains, Monty?” one said.

“The old man has seen some ‘brass,’ though,” the other answered.

“How do you like the fair one?” (meaning Tilly) the former remarked further.

“Good style, isn’t she?” was the answer. They both pretended to read some more.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Look, Father! Look at the eaves drawing wood with a team of goats!” Peter broke out in a burst of ecstasy.

“Oh, look!” the girls echoed, and Mrs. Dashwood gripped Andy by the leg to prevent him falling through the window in his eagerness to get a full view of the curiosity.

“See the goats, Granny?” Maria cried, nudging the old lady hard in the ribs.

“A boat, is it?” said Granny. “Ah wer’ in a boat one tahme, an’ it turned raht over an’——”

Granny’s irrelevant discourse was cut short by the excitable Peter.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” he yelled. “Did you see the whiskers on the leader, Father? As long as an old man’s.”

“Ah thinks he wer’ a ol’ man, thet cove,” the parent replied, “be th’ look on him.”

“Are they good pullers?” Peter questioned. Peter was travelling now, and bent on gathering useful information.

“Good pullers?” said old John, raising his voice to make himself heard, “soometahmes they be an’ soometahmes they baint.”

“Oh, they always pull,” James vouchsafed for Peter’s information, “if they’re put in a good paddock.”

Peter stared wonderingly at James, and asked:

“Why in a good paddock?”

“Well,” James drawled with a grin, “if there is good grass in it.”

Peter saw the joke, and laughed hard.

“What wer’ that?” inquired old John, curiously.

“James says they’ll pull grass, Father,” Peter shouted.

“Ah-h, they will thet,” said the parent, “an’ they gets their owners pulled soomtahmes.”

Peter’s restless eye discovered a new curiosity.

“Look at this though,” he called. “Look here! I’m jiggered. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

The others looked hurriedly, and saw the humble homestead of a struggling selector scattered about. Three lanky youths in charge of a lean, dreary looking horse fastened in some way to a fork-stick on which a water cask was being

conveyed in the direction of the home. One of the youths was pulling the quadruped along by the rein; another was astride it wielding a big stick on its ribs; the third was engaged in the dual capacity of conductor and driver. He balanced the cask with one hand and threw stones and things at the animal with the other.

"Poor things!" Mrs. Dashwood said, feelingly.

"An irrigation plant!" James drawled.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter exploded. "Look at the bloke on the moke's back—look at him, Father! Look at him."

Tilly was beginning to feel ashamed of Peter. Tilly felt that the eyes of those commercials were upon them, and she was inclined to be sensitive.

"Peter, don't be such a silly!" she said. "Do you want everyone to be laughing at you?"

Polly and Maria glanced round, and discovered the two strangers half strangling themselves with suppressed mirth.

"I declare," they said, "those men are laughing at us!"

"No wonder!" Tilly snapped indignantly. "The way he's going on would make a fool of anyone!"

But Peter didn't hear his sister's reprimand. His mind was all on the water carriers.

"Ha! Ha!" he started again, but suddenly checked himself. Then like a crack of lightning he went off

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! It's capsized! Ha! Ha! Ha!"



There was another rush for window space. Even the placid commercials sat up and looked out!

"Surely it baint!" said old John, sharing a window with James for a glimpse of the catastrophe.

"Poor people! what a shame!" murmured Mrs. Dashwood.

But the train plunging into a deep cutting excluded everything but memories of that selection scene from view.

"That's farming under difficulties for you, if you like!" James, with a sympathetic shake of the head, remarked as he settled again in his seat.

"Ah doan't know if it be farmin', lad," old John answered. "But Ah knows thet Ah'd sooner go to gaol than go on th' land thet way."

"Do you think there's any excuse for that sort of thing nowadays?" James asked.

"Well," the parent replied thoughtfully, "not fer ridin' th' horse, Ah don't expect. Theer be a lot o' bad menagement abaht that lot, no daht, but there 'll alez be people faghtin' up hill, lad, as long as they go on th' land wi' no capital. It takes a heap o' money—more'n people think—to take oop land an' make headway. Ah knows what it means. Ah've been through it all, an' so have your Moother. A lot on 'em think so long as they get hold on th' land theey're raht, whereas most tahmes theey're all wrong."

"Well, people struggling like those we just passed,"

James suggested, "would be much better off working on wages?"

"Far an' away better off," the parent said. "They'd have no worry, for one thing, an' they'd have a shellin' or two to spend soomtahmes."

After a silence.

"I see where the Minister for Lands said the other day," James remarked, "that he knew of cases where men went on the land with only half-a-crown in their pocket, and became well off."

"He sez soome queer things, do the Minister for Lands," old John replied, "soome very queer things! But what you never do hear on 'im sayin', lad, is that his own faither spent oondreds o' pahns sendin' him away to be edercated fer a barrister, an' that arter all his edercation he couldn't mak' a livin' at it. He wer' a fail'e!"

"So I believe!" James said, "and Judge Smith with scarcely any schooling made his way from the carpenter's shop to the Bench."

"Ah-h, an' they're you have it," explained the parent. "Thet wer' just th' difference atween he an' Judge Smith; an' so wi' men on the land. But fer all thet it dersent stand at all, lad, an' Judge Smith, Ah knows, would tell the same, thet the surest way to reach the Bench baint be bah neglectin' school, or startin' from a carpenter's shop!"

The roar of the locomotive now made it almost impossible to hear their own voices.

"I can't hear!" James shouted, leaning over towards his parent.

Old John leaned over, too, and bellowed out something which sounded like a gramophone in distress.

"Just so," James answered speculatively.

"Only a fool," was all James caught next.

"Yes," he ventured, nodding his head in approval, but of what he hadn't the slightest idea.

Old John gesticulated vehemently, and his eloquence seemed to increase under the disadvantages of the noise.

" . . . land . . . No . . . how could he . . . seasons . . . slightest chance . . . all th' sem," fell from him in distorted fragments.

"I dare say," James shouted.

Seeming satisfied with the impression his words were making, old John, using his large, leathery finger to emphasise his discourse, proceeded vigorously:

" . . . forty bushels . . . could . . . dry seasons . . . horses . . . settlement . . . do y' thenk?"

Then pausing, he seemed to expect a reply.

"Oh, I think you're right," James replied with a grin.

Old John shook his head in a dissatisfied sort of way, and wagging his finger more, repeated the observation:

" . . . dairying . . . no man . . . land . . . close settlement . . . could anyone . . . twenty years," he said.

"Oh, no doubt," James yelled, with another grin.

"What?" old John roared.

James desired to end the joke, and tapped himself on the ear and shook his head.

But old John was a persistent old man, and never liked to give in—not even to the noise of a train.

“ . . . ploughed land . . . miles and miles . . . their fault . . . a great country . . . people . . . naht follows day . . . millions . . . ’twill thet.”

“Do you think so?” James yelled, taking up the joke again.

“What!” old John howled.

“Millions of people,” James said.

“Certainly—why not?” roared the parent.

Just then everything was thrown into darkness, and the noise increased twofold. Sharp, nervous screams came from the women, and they huddled into each other for protection, and from Peter came a loud “Ha! Ha! Ha!” They were passing through a tunnel, but it seemed as though they were passing into eternity. Just as suddenly the light rushed in again, as the tunnel came to an end, and heavy sighs of relief fell from Mrs. Dashwood and Maria. The deafening noise had ended too, and once more they could converse freely.

Peter leaned out and stared back in astonishment at the mouth of that tunnel, while Polly and Tilly desired to know the name of it.

Maria said she “had heard what it was called, but couldn’t think of the name of it.”

“Ah-h dersent know at all,” old John candidly ad-

mitted, and supposed that it "went bah soome name or other."

One of the commercials who had moved into a seat that brought him nearer the family, and was evincing a deeper interest in passing objects, supplied the information:

"That's the Royal tunnel," he said, addressing old John.

Polly and Tilly stole sly glances at the sample hawker.

"Ah-h, it be the Royal tunnel," echoed old John, for the information of his daughters.

"Oh, the Royal tunnel," they murmured together.

"Yes, that's it," Maria exclaimed, giving the baby a shake up, "the Royal. I remember the name now."

"Really, Maria!" Tilly said with a mischievous smile.

Maria went crimson. She nearly went off the handle, too; but the baby starting to cry saved the situation.

"It's the longest tunnel in the State," the commercial further acquainted old John.

"It's the longest tunnel there be," old John promptly informed his relations without acknowledging his source of distorted information.

"Nearly a mile long," the other commercial, who had shifted nearer too, called out.

"Just fancy—nearly a mile long!" Mrs. Dashwood said, addressing her daughters. "It didn't seem half that."

"Tunnels are not what they seem, Mother," Tilly

answered, playfully parodying some of the "Psalm of Life."

Both commercials shifted their eyes to Tilly, and one more learned than the other said egotistically: "And the grave is not its goal."

Tilly looked away and smiled.

The commercials nudged each other.

James was curious to know who the contractors were that constructed the line, and interrogated the commercials. They stared. It was out of their line.

"Contractors?" they said, with puzzled airs, "goodness knows."

"Wilks, I suppose it would be?" James suggested, turning to his parent.

"Ah-h, Ah think it would be," old John answered.

The commercial men eyed James curiously. They seemed to regard him as a waste of time. But James paid no further attention to them, and they took up their magazines and continued reading between the lines.

Polly and Tilly, however, would occasionally steal glances at the backs of the magazines, and then whisper things to each other and titter.

"Tilly!" Mrs. Dashwood said sharply, "what is the matter with you?"

"I'm amused at Granny, Mother," Tilly answered diplomatically.

Mrs. Dashwood turned and saw Granny with her head

well back against the cushion, and her mouth open in deep slumber.

“Poor Granny!” she said, “is tired out!” And taking a lace handkerchief from her pocket placed it over the aged one’s face to keep the flies from disturbing her. And, with her long, lean hands hanging lifelessly beside her, Granny looked like a corpse laid out in a chair.

CHAPTER VIII.

Sandwiches and Commercials.

A H eud do wi' a bit o' a snack," old John said after a long silence, and glared at the portmanteaux.

"By Jove, so could I, Father," Peter put in, "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"We brought plenty with us," Mrs. Dashwood said, "if we can find the bag it's in."

"We'll soon fahnd it, Elahser!" and old John proceeded to drag the luggage about.

Tilly and Polly came to his assistance, and in a few moments all kinds of eatables were being handed round.

Old John displayed rare confidence in the sandwiches, and ate six and seven at a time.

"Look at Father!" Peter guffawed, stuffing a whole scone into his own mouth.

"Don't look at Father; look at yourself!" Tilly advised, and Peter, unable to control his visible faculties, broke out and lost the greater part of his scone. But what was Peter's loss was Maria's gain.

"Peter!" she cried indignantly, and jumped up to rid her lap of Peter's lunch.

Peter laughed some more, and tried another scone.

The compartment looked like a Sunday school treat on circuit.

"Ask those gentlemen," Mrs. Dashwood whispered to Tilly, "if they would have something to eat."

"No, Mother," Polly replied with bashful countenance, "you ask them yourself."

Mrs. Dashwood then called upon Tilly.

Tilly was not so bashful as Polly. Tilly made no bones about inviting the two strangers to break a crust.

"Would you gentlemen," she said, in clear, firm tones, "care to have a sandwich?"

Those commercials were nearly stunned. It was more than they expected. They coloured to the roots of their hair. But recovering quickly they smiled most ingratiatingly and said "they would, very much."

Tilly handed them some sandwiches, and they smiled again, and thanked her several times.

"Would you lahke soome 'ome-made beer?" old John inquired of the commercials, holding up a couple of bottles for them to examine.

They shook their heads, and said "they would rather the sandwiches."

"Yow can have *boath*, yow know!" persisted old John.

They shook their heads again and smiled.

"By crikey, I'll have a drink of that, Father," and Peter, staggering under the motion of the train, made his way to the basket of hop-beer and lifted a bottle to his head.

"Just look at him! . . . *Peter!*" Tilly protested. "There are plenty of glasses there!"

But Peter wasn't to be deterred. With his head tilted back, and the neck of the bottle half-way down his throat, he rolled the whites of his eyes about and glared at her like a thirsty poddy. Then with a gasp like an engine letting off steam, he put down the empty bottle.

"How do 'n go, lad?" old John asked, spilling out a glass for himself.

"Not too good, Father," Peter replied, with a malevolent grin at Tilly, who was responsible for the brew. "A bit soapy. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"You drank plenty of it, then," Polly put in.

"I was dead thirsty. Ha! Ha! Ha!" and Peter started on the sandwiches.

"He's very unkind, miss," one of the commercials ventured, with a winning smile at Polly.

Polly blushed, but made no reply.

"I suppose he didn't leave much in the bottle?" the other commercial remarked, smiling at Tilly.

"I wonder he left the bottle," Tilly remarked shortly.

Both commercials laughed in an obliging, condescending sort of way.

Peter looked up, and stared hard at them. Peter had scarcely noticed their presence before. Visions came to him of "spielers" and card sharpers, and he remembered things he had heard about "well-dressed travellers." Peter's suspicions were roused. He was alert and upon his

guard. He wished to warn his parent, and frowned and made facial contortions at old John. But old John failed to take the hint. Peter leaned over and squeezed his knee. Old John stared at his son. Peter significantly touched the part of himself where his sovereign belt lay concealed from the eyes of the world, at the same time glancing knowingly in the direction of the strangers. Old John understood. He started to think, and bestowed a searching gaze on the commercial travellers. He thought harder. He leaned back, and with half-closed eyes carefully studied the actions of the suspects for quite a while. His vigilance was soon rewarded. He observed them exchange knowing looks and smiles under cover of the periodicals they were pretending to read. Old John wanted no more. He was convinced they were wolves in sheep's clothing. He leaned forward, and in a series of whispers and nods communicated the discovery to his wife and Maria. They in turn passed the word to the others.

"Isn't it terrible to think they are allowed to go about like that?" Mrs. Dashwood said, with a look of great apprehension.

Old John placed a finger to his lips, to caution her to be discreet.

Peter spread himself over James and spluttered the intelligence into his ear, and told him to watch his pockets.

James said "Rats!" and shoved Peter from him.

Old John with a significant look at Mrs. Dashwood drew his coat tight across his chest and buttoned it up. Then

collecting the bags and baskets that had been opened for the purpose of providing the luncheon, secured them all, and placed them under his eye.

Mrs. Dashwood nudged Poll and Tilly to sit close to her, and for the remainder of the journey the two commercials were under a shadow.

After passing through mile upon mile of smouldering, smoking waste lands over which a fierce bush fire had obviously been raging for many days, after flying past Mullan-gangerina, and Niccoloconjoorooroo, and Bibleback, and Howe, and many other strange places, large suburban residences with luxuriant gardens and white paling fences about them began to show up. A succession of small shops took shape; pedestrians and motors and bikes began to come along in numbers, and the ascending spires of lofty churches elevated on hills, and volumes of black smoke curling into the sky could be seen from the windows.

Through the last cutting the train rushed, then the great city in all its age, in all its youth, in all its glory, in all its grime, in all its grandeur and in all its dirt and dust burst full before our country friends.

Excitement! There *was* excitement! None of them could remain still a minute longer. Not even Granny, who woke up and wished to know where she was, and how long she had been asleep. They were all in a flurry.

The train stopped. Peter tried to open the door, and discovered it was locked.

“We’re locked in!” Polly cried with alarm.

"Locked in?" echoed old John.

"By Jove we are, Father!" Peter cried.

Old John "tried" the door; then he put all his strength to it, and nearly shoved the train down.

"You don't get out for a while," one of the commercials called out.

"Who wer' it locked the door?" old John demanded suspiciously of him.

All the family turned their eyes on the sample men.

"That's what they've been up to!" Peter muttered in an undertone.

"Well, Ah'll see abaht it," old John said threateningly.

The commercial men smiled, and began collecting their belongings.

The door flew open and a railway porter bounced in.

"Tickets please!" he cried, sharply.

"Tickets," Polly and Tilly repeated, looking to old John.

"Thet door wer' locked," old John said, addressing the porter.

"It's not locked now," was the short answer. "Got your tickets?"

"Ah-h," and old John started fumbling in his pockets.

"You don't get out till she draws into the platform," the official volunteered, noticing Peter's eagerness to alight.

Old John searched the pockets of his coat and vest

without success, then proceeded calmly to dig down into the recesses of his trousers.

"What th' dooce did Ah do wi' 'n now?" he murmured.

"I saw you get them from Mr. Johnson, F'ather," Peter remarked.

The others regarded old John with anxious eyes.

The porter regarded him as an outrage.

"Can't you find them?" he said, impatiently.

"Ah put 'n somewheres," answered old John, screwing and twisting his body about to fit his big hands into his pockets.

"You surely can't have lost them, F'ather?" Mrs. Dashwood murmured with increased anxiety.

"Oh-h, Ah baint ha' lost 'n," old John answered with characteristic confidence. "Ah've got 'n soomwheres."

"Sure they ain't in this pocket, F'ather?" Peter suggested, taking a grip of his parent's black coat. and starting to go through him.

"You haven't got them, Mother?" Tilly suggested, looking at Mrs. Dashwood.

Mrs. Dashwood shook her head, and said she hadn't even seen them.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter cried, "what's this?" and he held up a tooth brush that he extracted from the coat pocket.

"Thet baint be 'n," said old John.

"Don't be playing the fool, Peter!" Tilly said, looking disgustedly at her brother.



THE PORTER REGARDED HIM AS AN OUTRAGE.

On An Australian Farm

The official lost patience.

"I can't wait on you all night," he snapped. "I'll come back after I collect the next carriage." And out he darted, banging and locking the door after him.

The family gathered anxiously about old John, all endeavouring to assist him in the search for the tickets by asking him useless questions about them.

"Oh-h, Ah *hed* them," old John assured first one and then the other. "Ah *hed* them *raht enoof*."

He took out his ponderous leather purse.

"Just keep a eye on they chaps," he mumbled cautiously.

Peter, straightening himself up, stood sentry over the commercial gentlemen, while his parent emptied the contents of that purse on to the cushions and examined them; but without success.

Peter broke into a laugh. Tilly promptly rebuked him.

"There is nothing to laugh at, Peter!" she said warmly.

"I was going to ask Father a question," Peter answered with a chuckle.

"What wer' it, lad?" said the parent, stuffing a roll of bank notes back into his purse.

"Do you think," Peter asked, "was there any chance of you putting them in that pocket Tilly sewed on your shirt, Father?"

"Idiot!" Tilly hissed at Peter.

Old John's hand suddenly went out in the locality of that pocket.

"But thet wer' copsakle down," he mumbled, as he became conscious of the absurdity of searching in that quarter.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter laughed, "did you see him going to feel if they were in it!"

The porter bounced into the carriage again.

"Have you found them?" he asked, with a stern look in his eye.

"Well, if Ah hed Ah'd give 'n to you," old John answered, with a huge smile.

"Are you sure you had them?" was the porter's next question.

"Well, Ah'm sure Ah paid for them," said old John, commencing to search himself all over again.

"Of course Father had them!" Tilly chipped in. "Do you think he would try to travel without tickets," and added: "The insolence of office!"

"Well, if you like to put it that way, Miss," the official retorted with a nasty leer, "what's he been doing if he hasn't got them—what have you all been doing?"

Mrs. Dashwood and Maria and James all started up in the same breath to defend old John and the family honour. But that porter had been entangled in arguments of the kind before.

"Oh, look here," he snapped, cutting them short, "I'm not here to barney with you. If you haven't got your

tickets. Mister, you must pay again. Where did you get in?"

"Pay again?" Mrs. Dashwood gasped.

"Pay *twice*?" from Maria.

"Don't you, Father!" Tilly advised. "Let them send and ask Mr. Johnson if he issued them!"

"Ah-h," suggested old John, "you ask Johnson abaht 'n. He'll tell 'e."

"Oh, you'll have to see the S. M.!" the porter jerked out, and opening the door commanded them to follow him to the magnate's office.

They seized their luggage, and like Brown's cows followed him. Some of them looked solemn, some looked convicted of bigamy; some looked amused.

Tilly and Polly hid their faces with things they were carrying, and tittered.

"Goodness gracious me!" Tilly said, "what on earth do people think of us!"

The great platform along which they trailed was thronged with people, some of them scrambling and jostling for possession of luggage; some rushing up and down peering into railway carriages; some hugging long lost brothers and sisters, and a great number staring curiously at the cortège that trooped at the heels of that swaggering railway man.

Hotel porters and boarding house touts thrust their advertising cards into old John's hand, and into the hands of every member of the family, and shouted the virtues of

their respective establishments into their ears. The crowded shelves of the open book-stalls with their glaring flaring placards inviting people to purchase the "newest wonder" in the literary line arrested the wondering gaze of our mutual friends. But the porter was in a hurry, and they were not permitted to linger and look.

They were approaching the door of the S.M.'s office. Old John suddenly stopped.

"Ah-h, hold on," he said with a smile.

Old John seemed to have remembered something.

"Have you found them, Father?" the family cried, with joyful expectation in their eyes.

Old John took a tobacco pouch from his pocket, out of which he slowly extracted the missing tickets.

"That be 'n," he said, handing them to the porter.

"A very stupid place to put tickets!" the porter remarked disappointedly, as he handed back the return halves.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Peter, "you got them, eh, Father?"

"Oh, Ah knew 'Ah hed 'n soomewheres," said old John. And they turned and departed.

CHAPTER IX.

A Swell Hotel.

TO one of the large hotels of the great metropolis old John Dashwood conducted his family. And as they mounted the stone steps leading to the door—a wide, open door of iron bars that reminded one of the gates to a gaol yard, and entered the capacious hall quite a new world revealed itself to them. There were porters in uniforms and brass buttons running here and there; departing visitors and fresh arrivals crowding round the manager's office; “casuals” passing in and out the “private bar”; newspaper reporters, advertising canvassers, and bailiffs were loitering about watching their chance to button-hole someone.

Small clusters of people—swell people—highly respectable looking folk, were assembled about the premises discoursing in the sweetest and jolliest of English. “Reallay!” and “How verray funnay!” would slide off their tongues at becoming intervals. And one was heard to say in quite a loud voice:

“Oh, ah, Laday Brownsmith, you, ah, heven’t met mai cousin just arraigned from England by the Wypanga—Miss, ah, De Largie-Jones, Laday Brownsmith.”

Hesitating, and huddling together on the wire mat our friends stood for a moment or two and wonderingly surveyed the new surroundings.

A gorgeous hat, resembling a basket of flowers, that adorned the head of a young lady in white attracted Peter's notice. Peter had a rare eye for art and beauty.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he broke out. "Ha! Ha!" There's a funny hat, Father!"

Both Tilly and Polly tugged at Peter's coat tails to silence him into timely and respectable behaviour, while James hissed into his ear: "Hold your tongue, you idiot!" Peter for once in a way obeyed James.

Several hopeful looking porters approached old John, and scraped and bowed to him like performing fleas in a show and called him "Sir." Hotel porters are the most humble and most obliging animals in the world when the prospect of a tip or several tips is sticking out.

"Ah'm on th' hoont for house room," old John began, with a smile. "Can yow put oop all this lot?" turning to his numerous charge, who were backing him up closely.

The hopeful looking porters grinned, and one said:

"It's a big order, Sir, come over to the office;" and across the stone square he strode in the lead, as if he were winning "all out" in a walking match. The other made a raid on the luggage and threatened to burst himself in several places in his haste to remove it somewhere, and earn something unusual.

"Four double rooms," murmured the clerk, "26, 27,

28, and 33, fifth floor," and handing old John a receipt for the deposit money, and a batch of keys with metal labels dangling to them like the brass plate round the neck of King Billy, he turned to attend to the next one.

"What am Ah to do wi' this lot?" old John enquired, eyeing the hotel lumber curiously.

"They're the keys to your rooms," the clerk said. "Always when you go out," he added advisedly, "leave them here." Then over his shoulder to the porter: "26, 27, 28, and 33, fifth floor, Smith."

Smith understood.

"Your luggage has all gone up, Sir," Smith said, turning to old John. "This way, Sir."

Next moment the family were being hustled and jammed into the lift. For all any of them knew to the contrary it might have been a solitary cell they were being relegated to. They stared at the padded walls, at the floor, at the electric appliances, and at each other.

"Where the deuce are we off to now?" Peter asked with a chuckle. Polly and Tilly laughed nervously. Mrs. Dashwood seemed to apprehend a sudden drop into eternity. She held Granny and little Andy close to her, and cautioned them to remain still until it was all over.

"Ah-h!" old John grunted, with a serious stare in his eye. "Ah-h."

"I think they're put us into a branding crush," James remarked with a quiet grin.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter laughed in an uncertain sort of

way. "If they start to brand me I'll kick the side out of it."

An electric bell went off with a sudden "th-r-r-r" right in old John's ear.

Old John started up as if he had been hit with lightning, and turned his head to locate the mystery. The women shuddered and thought of jumping out. The man in charge smiled. "Th-r-r-r" the bell went again. Old John involuntarily started once more, and Peter laughed freely, and said: "Look out, Father!" "Th-r-r-r" went the bell a third time, and the girls and Maria becoming used to it started to enjoy the joke.

"Ah thinks we be in a musical box!" said old John with a smile.

"A hurdy-gurdy, Ha! Ha!" Peter put in.

"I wish it would soon go!" Mrs. Dashwood murmured anxiously.

A tall lady, handicapped with jewellery and accompanied by a fat, red-faced, perspiring man squeezed their way in. The red-faced man removed his hat—a tall silk one—and glared at old John and James and Peter, who kept theirs on, as though they had done him serious injury at some time or other.

The man in charge closed the door with a rattle, touched a button, and up glided the lift. The peculiar motion took our friends completely by surprise. They staggered and rocked about, and would have toppled over

if they could. But they were packed together like sardines. Mrs. Dashwood gave a short scream.

"The bottom might fall out of it!" Peter cried, holding on to James in genuine alarm.

"Might fall out of you!" James hissed, shoving him off.

"She rises lakhe a kahte," old John said in admiration of the ride he was having. But it was a short ride. The lift stopped with a soft jerk, the door flew open, and there on a level with their feet was the fifth floor, while rooms 26, 27, and 28 were staring them in the face.

"Fifth floor, Sir," the lift man said, looking at old John.

"Ah-h," contemplatively, "ah-h! this be it," and stepping out on to the gorgeous carpet that graced the broad corridor, was hurriedly followed by Peter, James, Mrs. Dashwood, Granny, little Andy, Polly, and Tilly. Peter and James, when they found their footing, turned round again to learn more about the mysteries of that lift. But in an instant she had gone, and nothing was left but a closed door for them to gaze at.

"I thought I heard some one sing out as it went up," James said indifferently.

"So did I!" Peter answered. "I thought I heard 'Mother!'"

They approached the door and peeped through the bars of it down into the depths of the well.

“That’s a wonderful bit of work!” James mused, “wonderful!” James was interested in mechanics and inventions.

“If the door was left open sometime,” Peter answered, “and a fellow fell down there he wouldn’t think it very wonderful.”

Just then the lift descending dropped suddenly in front of them and emptied out Maria and the baby.

Peter and James jumped back and stared. They could scarcely believe their eyes.

A burst of grief escaped Maria, and she proceeded to charge all and sundry with conspiring to delude and get rid of her society.

“If I’m not wanted,” she howled, “why don’t they say so and let me go back!”

James was confounded.

“Heavens!” he said, “didn’t you get out with the rest of us?”

“How-could-I?” Maria sobbed, “wh-wh-when none-none of you w-w-waited.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter yelled, bounding to the others, who were studiously comparing the numbers on the doors with the key labels. “Father! Mother! Ha! Ha! Ha! Maria’s been lost already!”

They all turned, and in a glance took in the situation.

“Dear me!” Mrs. Dashwood exclaimed, hurrying to sympathise with the distressed one, “I just missed you and was going to ask where you were, child.”



A BURST OF GRIEF ESCAPED MARIA.

On An Australian Farm

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"I don't think it troubled any one much where I was," Maria blubbered. "We might have been killed for all the rest of you cared."

Old John and Polly and Tilly stared in astonishment. They couldn't understand the exact cause of Maria's woes.

"She was carried on," James explained. "They took her to the top, and brought her back again."

"Well, I'm sure that's nothing to be very sore about!" Tilly said with a laugh. "She got a longer ride than the rest of us, that was all."

Maria broke out into hysterics. "You needn't say anything," she railed at Tilly. "You needn't think you're thought so very grand, my lady, and if you want to know, I heard that man and the lady in the lift say that you were all a lot of country bumpkins down to spend the pig money!"

Old John's eyes and mouth opened steadily. Peter yelled "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" and danced about with a bag in his hand.

"By Jove," he said, "that's one against you, Father."

James and his mother took Maria in hand, and had just succeeded in calming her when a maid in a white apron and a white cap and a beautiful smile came skipping along looking for employment. She examined the keys and pointed out the rooms corresponding. Old John, with Mrs. Dashwood and little Andy, took possession of No. 26; Granny and Maria were given 27; Polly and Tilly 28; and James and Peter 33, which was located around the corner.

The maid also showed them the way to the lavatories, and told them where to find the drawing-room and the writing-room, and gave Polly and Tilly a lot of useful information regarding the theatres and places to visit, finally announcing that dinner would be ready on the ground floor in about twenty minutes. She hurried away to attend the wants of other new arrivals.



CHAPTER X.

The First Dinner.

DINNER was ready. The electric light was in full blaze when the Dashwood family, headed by old John, sauntered in. And such a dining-room! It was all chairs and tables, and serviettes, and looked large enough to accommodate the whole city. Male and female attendants, laden with dishes of roast turkey and roast duck and fowl, and ice creams and wine bottles, and heaven only knows what, floated in and out, and round about the tables, never colliding once with each other, never falling over a table. They had no sense of the ludicrous at all, had those waiters and waitresses—humorous situations were only wasted on them! They were a dull, useless asset to the institution; a calamity to mankind.

For the first few minutes it seemed as though the declining birth-rate, or something, was seriously affecting the population of the hotel, and old John, looking round at the "heads," started to wonder aloud if "this wer' all thet coomes for dinner?" when the curtains were drawn aside and quite a cohort of superior people trooped in and settled round the tables like a flock of native companions gathering round a spread on the grass. What an effect their entrance

made on the atmosphere! Napoleon in his bad old court days couldn't have commanded anything more stylish or imposing. The low cut dresses, the long sweeping skirt tails, the hair combs and powder and paint of the ladies were things to go to bed and dream about; while the broad immaculate shirt fronts, the glittering diamonds and the little Johnny coats that distinguished the gentlemen were chattels that any common person with a spark of patriotism in his soul would willingly give up the life of his best girl to possess. But the way they talked! Ah, we mustn't forget the way they talked—their lovely speech—their silvery-toned tongues. No one would ever think of cutting those tongues out. But there were others to arrive. In the rear came an assortment of quietly dressed people of all callings and kinds. They put on no frill—they just dropped into seats and adjusted themselves wherever they could. Two demure old maids who looked like twins planted themselves beside James and Peter, and entered into a lively conversation with themselves about the writings of George Eliot.

"Oh, I think she's simply *dee-vine*," one said, with tremendous emphasis on the "vine," and giving her nose a screw that nearly lost it to her.

"*Dee-light-ful*," said the other.

"Did you ever read her definition of MAN?" asked the first one.

"Nevah," replied the other with a sparkling eye and wonderful smile, "but I'm sure it would be delicious—just."

"It's awfully funny—*awfully*. (Tilly nudged Polly and both began to smile.) She says that man can see through a barn door, and that is why he can see so little on this side of it."

They both laughed merrily, and the second old girl shaking her head said:

"Oh, isn't that just *beautiful*!"

"But what did Bartle say in reply to that?" Tilly audaciously clipped in across the table.

The two old maids lifted their eyes and stared across the cruet at her, and one of them said:

"I beg your pardon?"

Polly felt shocked at Tilly's audacity, and nudged her to be silent. But Tilly had an impulsive nature; besides, she generally knew what she was talking about.

"Bartle's reply to that was," Tilly went on, "that a woman was a match for a man—such a match as the horse-fly is to the horse."

"Oh!" the old maids murmured disappointedly, and one threw up her eye-brows and added: "How heroic of you!"

A hard-faced, weather-beaten old sea captain strolled in and dropped down unceremoniously beside old John, and glared round at every one.

Peter drew James's attention to a puddy, rotund swell with a large nose and bloated face, seated between two extravagantly decorated females about half his own age, and started to laugh. James promptly silenced him.

"They're devilish slow in this place!" growled the sour old sea captain, addressing old John.

"Ah've jest been athinkin' so, too," answered old John.

"Here you!" the man of the sea said hoarsely, seizing a seedling of a waiter by the flying coat-tails and making a prisoner of him, "when are you going to haul something ashore here?"

"Oh! why! hain't yer bein' attended to, S'?" squeaked the waiter.

"Not a darn wait," was the answer, "nor anyone here so far as I can see. One of your kidney has taken the orders. So just you slip along, sonny, and be as slick as a polished gun barrel, and shake 'em up!" And the captain released his prisoner.

Peter and Polly and Tilly burst out laughing.

"This establishment wouldn't make a living for one in London or New York," the captain said, addressing old John again.

"Ah-h," replied old John, "Ah never wer' in them places."

"What! never in London or New York?" and the captain looked astonished.

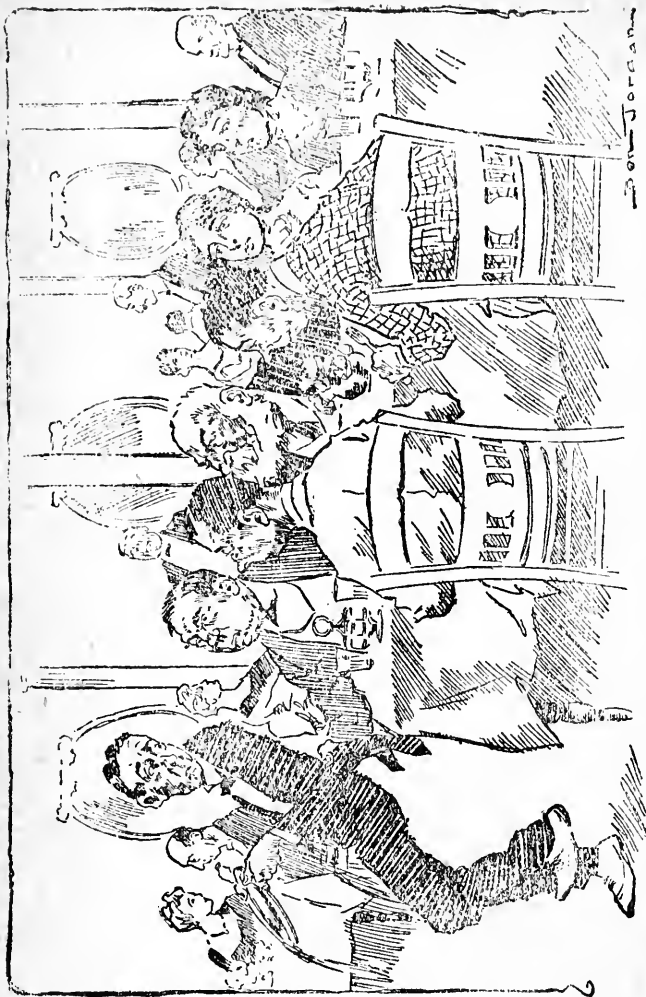
Old John shook his head in the affirmative.

"Why, where have you been all your life, then?"

"Well, Ah coome from Fairfield," answered old John.

"Fairfield? What's that?" asked the captain, "a flag station?"

Old John wasn't sure of the other's meaning.



"HERE YOU!" THE MAN OF THE SFA SAID TO MYSELF.

"A flag station! Ha! Ha!" Peter guffawed.

"Fairfield is a farming district," Tilly said, coming to the rescue.

"Ah-h, farmin'," old John repeated.

"Oh, I tumble," the captain grunted, running his eye over the family. "What do you grow there—pumpkins?"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Pumpkins!" Peter exploded loudly, and attracted everyone's attention.

"No, *bumpkins*," Tilly said, with an amused smile at Maria.

"We grows them too," old John answered good naturedly, "but we goes in for wheat mostly."

"How much wheat do you grow in a year?" was the captain's next query.

"Abaht 15,000 bags some years," said old John.

"About as much as I stick in my hold then, some trips!" and the man of the sea looked away indifferently. Then, as the waiter appeared and placed a plate of oyster soup before him: "What th' devil's this?"

"Hoyster soup, S'."

"Where have you put th' darned oysters? (taking out a pair of spectacles and placing them on his nose) where th' devil are they? Eh?"

The waiter smiled and hurried away. Another appeared, supported by a second, armed with the order for the Dashwood family, and next moment old John and the rest of them were busily engaged supping soup, sampling

roast duck, turkey, and all the rest, and studying the menu in turn for further variety.

An hour went by pleasantly.

There was a loud rhythmical swish of silks and satins, and a contingent of the "best" people rose from their tables and passed out.

The old man of the sea looked up and studied them as they moved along.

"You would never suspect," he growled, "that those fine birds might have the silver spoons they've just been using stuck in their stockings!"

There was a general laugh, in which the two old maids joined, and one of them remarked:

"It's quite true—they do; and it's mostly done by those who are frequent visitors to Government House."

"It's a woonder they doan't stop 'n," suggested old John.

"Yo! Ho! Ho!" laughed the captain. "Who's goin' to bell the cat? Ho! Ho! Ho! It would make a fine scene. It 'd beat the theatre. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

The two old maids blushed, and looked away. Tilly and Polly and Maria smiled.

Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled, "they'd have to search them."

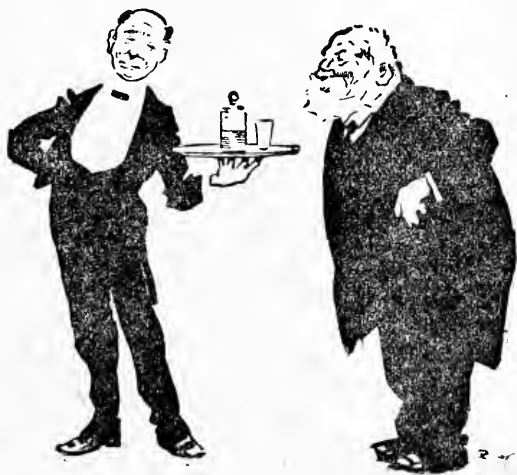
"And then they'd beat you," said the captain.

"Yow seems to know all abaht 'n," old John remarked with a broad smile.

The captain looked at him with one eye closed for several seconds, then said:

“Know them as I do the Coral Sea; but darn me if I know which wants watching the closest.”

Tilly and Polly and James and Peter having finished dinner talked of going to the theatre. Mrs. Dashwood asked Maria if she would like to go too, and offered to take charge of the baby for her. Maria, after looking at the infant slumbering in her arms a number of times and thinking hard over the matter, finally decided to wait until the next evening. Tilly nudged Polly hard by way of communicating her feelings of joy at Maria's decision, and they all rose from the table and went out, leaving the captain and the two old maids to stare at each other.



CHAPTER XI.

At the Theatre Door.

POLLY and Tilly, with "clouds" over their heads and fans in their hands, joined James and Peter on the ground floor of the hotel. James inquired of the hall porters the way to the theatre.

"Are you going to His Majesty's?" the head porter asked.

James wasn't quite sure.

"Don't go there; he might kiek us out. Ha! Ha!" from Peter.

The porter grinned at Peter, and said advisedly to James: "'In Australia' is on at His Majesty's, and it's splendid, I believe, Sir. Take any of those trams (pointing to the flaring head light that were moving off one by one), they'll drop you right at the door. Corner o' Walker and Rum Streets."

James thanked him, and led the way out. They had just reached the bottom of the steps when old John's voice rang out behind them.

"Hauld on, Ah'm acomin' weth yow," he cried, dragging his nail-can hat over his ears as he hurried along.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Here's Father coming!" Peter yelled delightedly. "I knew he couldn't stay behind."

The porters standing with folded arms in the door-way chuckled to themselves at the lob-sided manner that old John descended the steps.

"Yower Moother and Maria say they doaned want I," he said in explanation, "so Ah'm coomin' along wi' yow."

Polly said she was glad he had decided to join them.

"We're all going to His Majesty's Theatre, Father," Tilly remarked cheerfully. "A play called 'In Australia,' such a good one, I believe, is to be on to-night."

"Oh-h," said old John, walking along between his two daughters, "but we be in Australia, baint us?"

"Ai, in Australia, Father," Peter said, "where all the convicts used to pull in teams instead of horses."

"Sh, Peter!" Polly laughed. "In the cities, you know, you should only talk about convicts in whispers."

"I believe this is a great play, though," James remarked as they neared the tram. And Peter, striking himself where his money bag was buckled about his body, said with a chuckle:

"It's there yet, Father, have you got yours?"

"Oh, Ah've got 'n," the parent answered. "No 'n has arobbed me yet, lad."

"The worst of mine is," Peter went on, "I can't get at it without taking off my clothes. You'll have to pay for me at the theatre. Father!"

"Just what we thought!" Tilly exclaimed indignantly. "Now, don't you, Father; let him do it himself."

"He'll sponge on everyone all the time he's here," James informed his parent, "and carry home every shilling he's got on him. He's as mean as a money lender."

"Be thet so, lad?" old John asked good-humouredly of Peter.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" was Peter's answer. "Ha! Ha! Ha! That's just what James would do himself."

They squeezed their way into a crowded train, and next moment were propelled through the bright and crowded streets. Old John and James and Polly and Tilly found seats together, but Peter was relegated to the end of the carriage, where he was compelled to take his ride standing up.

The ticket collector passed along. James paid for four, purposely leaving Peter to finance his own fare. Peter shook his head and laughed at the collector. James nudged his sisters and they smiled in the direction of Peter.

"I haven't any money," Peter said quite loud, and attracted the attention of the passengers.

The collector took out his note book and pencil, and said:

"Your name and address, please!"

"That's my Father," Peter answered, pointing to old John, "he'll pay for me."

"Oh-h, ah-h," said old John, fumbling for his purse, when the collector made the demand, "he have lots o'

money, lots o' it, but he keeps it all here, yow know," and he tapped himself on the ribs.

The collector smiled and said: "Afraid of getting robbed, I suppose."

"Soomit lahke thet," and old John handed out a coin.

Some passengers who overheard old John's explanation turned their eyes on Peter and smiled, and one of them said in a loud voice: "He's from the country, I'll lay a quid."

Polly and Tilly nudged each other, and gazed down on the floor of the tram.

"Yow'd win thet bet," old John called out to the man. "He's a coontry man raht enoof, an' Ah should know, 'cause Ah'm his father."

"You're as like each other," the man said, "as two green flats."

While some of the passengers laughed and others smiled, the tram stopped before the theatre and our friends stepped out.

The usual crowd of all sorts that frequent the theatres were assembled about the doors.

A band of ill-clad, ready-witted city urchins gathered round old John.

"Pay us in, Mister!" they implored pathetically of him. Old John didn't quite understand.

"What wer' it, lads?" he inquired, bending down his ear to them.

The boys were in sad distress.



Ben Jordan

A BAND OF ILL-CLAD CITY URCHINS GATHERED ROUND
OLD JOHN

On the Australian Farm

"Oh! I ain't had a bit ter eat all day, Mister!" one said. Another pleaded for a "sprat." Some more pressed their appeal to be "paid in." Old John's heart went out to the youthful impostors. He gave one a shilling and caused a riot. The recipient was immediately set upon and plundered by a number of his companions. Old John proceeded to form himself into a board of conciliation.

"Nah then, melads," he said, "Ah gin it to this yun; let 'n have it."

They let him have it, and he disappeared in the crowd like a wallaby flying through scrub.

"Well, pay us in, too, Mister," the others whined about old John again, and his heart was touched once more.

"Come along, they're all going in, Father!" Tilly cried anxiously. "We won't get a seat if we don't hurry."

Someone connected with the play-house made a raid on the street arabs, and they fled in all directions, calling him names as they bounded off.

"Five of us," said old John in answer to the man at the ticket office. The official handed out the tickets and the change with a loud bang, and old John and his party entered the theatre.

It was a "big" night, and a big house. The immense building was almost filled in every quarter, and still they were coming. The galleries were in a state of pandemonium. The "gods" were whistling and howling lustily for the curtain. The dress circle was ablaze with jewellery, bare skin, frizzled hair, and genteel people.

Old John from his place in the stalls glared all about for several seconds.

"Well, Ah never!" he murmured in admiration.

"*What* a lot of faeces," Polly gasped.

Tilly, who had been to a smaller theatre twice before, tried to impress the others with her indifference to the scene by remaining silent.

But Peter was puzzled.

"I'm blowed if I can see where they act," he said.

"Can you, Father?"

"Ah wer' just alookin'," his parent answered.

The orchestra opened. The music had a visible effect on Polly and Tilly. They couldn't keep still. They seemed to be itching to rise and dance to it.

"Blow that," Peter protested, "I want to see them act!"

Peter was not a musician.



CHAPTER XII.

The Play's the Thing.

THE curtain rose. The house applauded. Peter and Polly and Tilly strained their necks to get a full view of the opening scene. The home of a poor selector was disclosed. A burning lamp stood on the table. Beneath the open window stood a bucket of water. Through the window glared a bush fire that was raging outside. The old selector (Tom Broggs by the programme) was seated at the fireplace, sad and despondent-looking.

"Oh, isn't it real!" Polly gasped.

"A selection!" Tilly answered.

The selector's wife (Mrs. Broggs—*Miss Vida Delback*, the programme announced) entered with a pair of men's pants that wanted repairing, hanging over her arm, and gazed silently about the scant shelving in search of something.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter broke out, and was promptly suppressed by Tilly and James.

"I had a needle to-day, somewhere," Mrs. Broggs said in a clear voice, "whatever on earth could I have done with it?"

She went on ransacking the shelving.

“That’s just lahke what ye’er Moother would do,” old John whispered hoarsely to his family.

The great audience watched Mrs Broggs with intense silence. She looked round, and discovering the old selector (her husband) seated gloomily at the fireplace, approached him and placed a hand lightly on his shoulder.

“Ah, don’t brood over it so much, Father!” she said in touching tones. “I know it’s very hard and disheartening after all your years of work and waiting, to see the fences and crops burnt like that. But you did all you could to fight it, and the boys and the two girls are still doing their best with it! Thank God you were able to save the house, so don’t take it to heart any more, Father. It will surely come right in the end—everything does, if you notice.”

Then looking round and assuming a cheerful tone: “Besides, we haven’t heard from the storekeeper yet about the corn. You never can tell what it might fetch, or how well off we shall be yet. Do you know, I’ve been for days watching for the mailman to bring a letter, and something tells me there’s one not far off.”

“Oh, isn’t she good!” Tilly said to Polly.

Without raising his head selector Brogge dragged a letter from his pocket and handed it to his wife.

“The mailman came when I was fighting the fire, Ellen,” he said in a rough, sorrowful voice.

Mrs. Broggs took the letter and read aloud for the benefit of the audience: “*Twelve pounds your maize*

brought. I have accordingly credited your account with this amount, which now leaves a balance of £3 owing." A heavy sigh came from Mrs. Broggs, and letting fall the letter she sank in a lifeless sort of way beside her husband and hid her face in her hands.

"Poor thing!" Polly murmured.

"Isn't it like a lot of cases!" Tilly said sadly.

"Go on the land, young man!" a voice in the gallery called out, and the great audience began to laugh in spite of itself.

Here a quaint-looking selection boy whom the programme set forth as "Sam, youngest son of old Broggs," limped on in an indifferent sort of way.

The audience greeted his arrival with merriment, and Peter cried:

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ain't he like Ted Tomkins?"

"Like the boy at Myrtles," Polly said, smiling.

"That's the cove I meant," Peter yelled. "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Take it easy, old chap," a man sitting behind said to Peter, "take it easy."

Sam Broggs stared through the window at the alleged fire and stuttered:

"Oh-hoh. They're all kuk-kuk-eomin' in ergain from it. They kuk-kuk-couldn't best it. Oh-hah! L-L-L-L-Look at her bub-bub-burnin' th' stock-yard. Gee winks, th-that 'd be th' place tut-to coo-coo-cook bread, mum."

"Cook bread! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter roared. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Oh crikey."

"Shut up!" the man behind Peter said, and James growled a warning to behave himself into Peter's ear.

Old Broggs rose from his despondency and position, and struggling with his emotion, said to Sam:

"What was that you said, my boy?"

Mrs. Broggs also rose and made an effort to put a cheerful face on things.

"Hoh g-g-gee winkie," Sam answered, "where 'll y-y-you milk th' kuk-kuk-cows now, Father?"

Some of the audience thought it necessary to laugh, and some regarded the moment as premature. Those who thought it premature cried "*Silence!*"

Peter was one of those who thought it necessary to laugh.

Other members of the selector's family trooped on. They were Dan Broggs and Dave Broggs, and were accompanied by an ancient and asthmatic uncle. Each of them carried the charred fragments of the green boughs they had used to belt the fire with. Their entrance was the signal for loud applause and mirth, and Peter, at the top of his voice, cried:

"Oh, crikey, Father, ain't that old bloke like Christie Slater?"

The new characters threw down their worn-out boughs, and sighed "Christopher" and "Laws!" in the same breath.

Then in turn they dipped into the water bucket and drank like camels.

"I could drink a river dry," Dave Broggs drawled.

"I could drink one blooming well *full*," Dan Broggs declared.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled at this. "That was good, Father, he could drink it full."

"Shut up and give the cove on the stage a chance," growled the man sitting behind Peter.

James dug Peter hard in the ribs. But Peter had no feeling. His eyes and mind were all on the performance.

"Do you know, my dress caught fire again, Mother," Sarah Broggs said, displaying the charred parts of her garment as she walked about the stage.

Mrs. Broggs threw up her hands as though about to collapse, and exclaimed:

"Oh, my goodness! my gracious, child, you might have met with your death!"

"My word, Sarah got into a tight place, Mother," said Dan Broggs, "and it took me all my time to put her out. I was the only one of the crowd near her."

"Oh dear, oh dear, children!" and Mrs. Broggs showed further symptoms of going off. As an after-thought, however, she suddenly rallied and asked in a surprised voice:

"But where was your sister?"

"Who, Kate, Mother?" and Sarah Broggs grinned and made faces that stirred the risible faculties of the audience again. "Why, she was with Jim Mackenzie, of course, he

was giving us a hand, you know, or—er—giving Kate his hand.” She grimaced again and disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the audience once more.

“Oh, she’s simply splendid!” Tilly affirmed. And Peter laughed and rolled about in his seat until the man behind him touched him on the shoulder and said: “Be careful, old chap.”

“But you’re sure you’re not burnt, my girl?” Mrs. Broggs went on with much concern.

“Oh, you couldn’t burn me, Mother,” Sarah Broggs answered.

“No, you couldn’t, Mother,” Dan Broggs added, helping himself to another drink. “She’s too green to burn.”

And the laughter that greeted Dan’s observation was something to remember. It nearly proved fatal to Peter. “Did you hear that, Father?” he yelled to old John, “‘She was too green to burn.’ Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Hah-h-h! Oh Laws!”

“Say mate,” said the individual at Peter’s back, “I’d like to syndicate that smile of yours.”

Tilly and James overheard the rude observation, and they both glanced sideways at Peter, and laughed on their own account.

“But poor Uncle,” Sarah Broggs ran on, directing sympathy to her dilapidated relative, “*did* get a nasty burn! Such an ugly scar! (placing her hand lightly upon the scarecrow’s shirt collar she proceeded to show the wound). A burning limb fell on him, and a red hot coal slid right

down his neck. (The Uncle crouched and flinched from the touch of her hand.) Just look at it! (Uncle let off a yell which made those on the stage and those off it roar with merriment.)”

“I don’t see,” the wreck cried, “what yer’ve got ter laugh at!”

The audience laughed more.

Dan and Dave Broggs apologised to their relative for making light of his trouble

The old Uncle, growling to himself, lifted the bucket to his head, and started drinking like a horse.

“Look out, old chap,” a gruff voice in the audience called out, “or you’ll be kicking the bucket soon.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” cried Peter.

“Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!” roared old John, and added: “An’ he looks as if he’ll kick th’ boocket raht enoof.”

The Uncle set the bucket on the floor, wrong end up, and calmly seating himself on it, proceeded to feel his sore neck.

Peter almost lost control of himself. “Father,” he shouted, “ain’t he a funny beggar!”

“It must be very painful to you, I’m sure, Uncle,” Mrs. Broggs said sympathetically. “Won’t you let me put something on it—a little sweet oil?”

“Oil’s no use to it,” old selector Broggs put in, addressing his distressed brother, “you put a fistful of flour on it—that’ll bring th’ heat out of it in no time (turning to

Mrs. Broggs). Get me a pinch o' flour, Mother, I'll put it on for him."

Mrs. Broggs shook her head sorrowfully, and said:

"There isn't a bit in th' house, Father—till some comes!"

Some of the audience murmured: "Poor things!"

"If there were," the Uncle growled in protest, "I wouldn't let *him* put it on. I'd want chloroform first."

"Good man," shouted some one in the pit, and again the great audience were provoked into merriment.

"Now run away, dear, and change your dress," the mother said to Sarah Broggs. Then remarking the absence of the other daughter, she asked: "But where is your sister?"

"Out talking to Jim Mackenzie, of course," Sarah Broggs replied. "They'll be in directly, Mother."

"A fat lot of p-p-puttin' out th' fire they d-d-did," Sam Broggs said. "I knows how they'd do it, hangin' r-r-round each other's n-n-necks."

Mrs. Broggs here called the precocious Sam to order, and Sarah Broggs reminded him that he knew far too much for a little boy.

Sam made faces at them which pleased the audience.

"Well, anyhow, Mother," the old selector interposed in dramatic tones, "sweetheartin' in this way ain't th' right thing for a gal o' mine. Outside ain't no place for it. It weren't th' way them things wer' done in my time."

"Oh, they'll be in in a moment, Father," Mrs. Broggs

answered conciliatingly. "There's no need to be angry—Jim is a decent young man."

"That's all right enough," roared the selector, "he might be a decent young man. But he's on'y flesh an' blood like any one else, and this outside business ain't the right thing—leastaways it ain't in my eyes."

The audience were in a frivolous mood, and enjoyed the old selector's ideas of the wrong way to conduct a courtship.

Dan Broggs and Dave and Sarah and the asthmatic Uncle withdrew, while old selector Broggs moved to the open window and gazed out into the night.

"Years o' work gone in a day!" he moaned.

Mrs. Broggs showed great concern for the mind of her husband.

"Don't worry any more about it, Father!" she pleaded. "Remember we have got our health and our strength left, and what we did before we can do again!"

The old selector turned and took his wife's hand.

"That's right spoken, Ellen," he said. "You were always a brave woman. We *have* our health, and we have our strength—and we have fought fires before, and floods, and droughts, and debts, and enemies, and what we have done before we can do again—and *will* do."

A great cheer came from the audience. Old John squeezed a tear from his eye and whispered to Polly: "Ah moost breng your Moother an' Granny to see this!"

There was loud knocking on the door of the selection

home, and a burly, sandy-bearded Scotchman named McClure, arrayed in shabby, tattered kilts, and accompanied by his wife, a thin, spare woman, entered, to the surprise of old Broggs and Mrs. Broggs. They all greeted each other, and old Broggs offered them a seat.

"We canna sit," McClure said, "we're baith sair wi' hurry. Hae ye seen a' that's put in th' paper aboot yoursel'?"

Old Broggs stared and said he hadn't seen the paper for a month.

"It's richt prood o' ye we are," McClure proceeded, while his wife smiled and nodded her endorsement. "We're prood o' ye, Meester Tam Broggs, Justice o' th' Peace."

"What, *me*?" old Broggs gasped.

"My Tom?" cried Mrs. Broggs.

"Ay, an' gi' us ye're haun'," said McClure. "I congratulate baith o' ye."

They all shook, while the audience howled and laughed.

"Well, I can hardly believe it," said old Broggs, excitedly.

The burly Scot produced a newspaper as evidence.

"Old Johnson, the member, must have done that," the selector said, thinking hard.

"Ay!" replied McClure, "seein' that you've always been against him with your family votes why would he no'?"

"By Jove!" gasped old Broggs.

"An' o' course ye'll ha' tae gi' him your support from

now till the day o' judgment; ye canna help yoursel'," McClure went on.

"That's the way they get all the democrats to go over," a voice from the gallery yelled, and the audience burst into laughter, cheers, and hoots.

"Ye'll be spoke about an' meentioned a' ower the country," Mrs. McClure assured them.

"Just like Bobby Burns," added McClure.

"Who's he?" innocently inquired old Broggs.

"What mon!" cried McClure, "hae ye never heerd tell o' Bobby Burns? Do ye no ken his poems an' sangs?"

Old Broggs shook his head.

Here Dan Broggs, who with Dave Broggs and Sarah Broggs and the battered Uncle had returned to the stage with their faces washed, spoke and said:

"I think I heard tell of that cove somewhere when you come to mention his name."

"Ye *think* ye deed!" said McClure satirically, and once more the audience took a leading part.

"He was a great boxer!" Dave Broggs affirmed.

"May th' Lord forgi' ye," snapped McClure, and the gods yelled and whistled their delight.

In the middle of the pandemonium an undersized stock-headed Irishman whom the programme said was "Mr. Dooley, a neighbour," bounced on, and throwing his hat on the floor said, addressing Broggs:

"Be th' powers above an' below, an' beneath, Oi congratulates yez—a Justice o' th' Paece! But it's meself

phwat's prouder of yez nor if yez wer' me own brather. An'. an' pwhat 'll it be worth to yez in gold?"

Broggs grinned and said he didn't think it would be worth anything.

"Do yez tell me that it won't?" said Dooley disappointedly.

"It's an honorary posection, mon," McClure explained for Dooley's benefit.

"An honorary possition?" Dooley repeated with an air of perplexity.

"Ye dinna understaun' becaise ye hae no sense o' honour yoursel', Dooley," said McClure.

"See that now," remarked Dooley, with a side wink at the audience.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" came from Peter, and the man behind touched him on the shoulder and said:

"What's he paying you for smiling at his jokes?"

Tilly nudged James, and they both glanced back at the man.

The play rattled on.

"Well, if they give me anything I'll take it, you may depend," old Broggs assured Dooley.

"An' they'll give it," Dooley answered, "they'll give it; an' sure if they don't yez can give thim six months."

A fresh contingent of neighbours rushed in, including a large German girl with a feeble voice. She was named Miss Holstein. She bowed to Mrs. Broggs and said:

"Mother told me to tell you she was so sorry she

couldn't come herself. She's got to make a poultice for father's foot. But she's very pleased about it, and hopes you won't get too proud to come and see her like you always used to."

The audience didn't applaud Miss Holstein. They "meowed" like a thousand lost cats instead.

"So she wud be pleased, I'm sure of that, peoor woman," Dooley said, sidling towards Miss Holstein and making eyes at her. "The same as all of us here are pleased," and after a pause he added, "And might I be after askin' pwhat is the matter wid your father's fut?"

The house was nearly brought down.

"Oh Laws, Father," Peter cried, regaining his breath, "I *am* enjoying meself."

"He hurt it," answered Miss Holstein.

"Oh, he did," Dooley said, edging closer to her, "an'—an'—did it hurt *him*?"

Miss Holstein stared curiously at Dooley while the audience yelled again.

Dooley proposed they have a dance in honour of the occasion, and the others echoed enthusiastically, "A dance! A dance!"

The orchestra struck up a Scottish air, and McClure stepped forward and danced the Highland Fling.

The audience seemed pleased when he stopped and bowed.

"'Tis a shtrange thing," said Dooley, "that a Scotchman be can niver dance nor foight wid his trousers on."

The audience saw the joke and cheered Dooley.

"Oh, bless me, Father," Peter gasped, "ain't he a funny dog!"

The music changed, and all hands on the stage joined in a wild and prolonged country dance. And how they *did* dance! Tilly and Polly clutched at each other in their excitement.

Old Broggs swung Mrs. Broggs; McClure swung Mrs. McClure; and Dooley was swung by Miss Holstein. It was grand to watch them.

"That's soomit lahke dancin'," old John said.

In the middle of it Mrs. Broggs swooned away, and hung, lifeless-looking, in the arms of old Broggs, who called out excitedly:

"Some water! quick! some water!"

Next moment Dooley swooned, and hung like a corpse in the arms of Miss Holstein.

Miss Holstein screamed and gazed into the face of her partner.

The audience enjoyed the situation.

"Whisky! quick! Some whisky!" Dooley shouted. And the curtain dropped, and rose again and dropped.

"Mah word," old John said, when all the cheering ceased, "Ah moost bring yower Moother to see this."

CHAPTER XIII.

A Ramble Round Town.

“WELL, what’s it to be?” asked old John, as the family congregated on the steps of the hotel. soon after breakfast, “a trip to the bay in a boat or up tahn soomewhere?”

Tilly said she was dying to see the ocean. Polly shuddered and said she had no inclination to be drowned, she would rather be killed in a train or with an axe. Maria thought there was time enough to see the sea, and longed to visit the great emporium that advertised the cheap drapery. Peter suggested a visit to the museum.

“Ah-h,” murmured old John, “the mooseum’s a place Ah would lahke to see mahself.”

“Oh, for goodness sake don’t let Peter go there,” Tilly advised, “they’ll want to keep him.”

“Well, if they saw all the sausages Father had this morning,” Peter answered, “they’d sooner keep me than him.”

“Indeed yes,” Polly agreed, “fancy three plates of them!”

“Ah-h,” reflected old John, “them wer’ good sausages—Ah never hed better.”

"Well, let us go *somewhere*—we don't want to stand here all day like grass trees," Tilly urged impatiently.

The family moved off in double file. They sauntered slowly from one street to another, dodging out of the way of the scurrying city pedestrians, gazing up at the giddy heights of the massive stone buildings opposite; peering at the goods displayed in the glass windows, and drawing each other's attention to street oddities and the queer looking folk of the city.

An aged and humble looking mendicant seated near a wall, his open hand extended in piteous appeal like a church plate, and around whose neck dangled a placard conveying in printed letters the pathetic information that the wearer was "stone blind," attracted their attention.

"A blind man! oh dear!" the women gasped, and pausing, read the lines on the placard with the sanctity of feeling that people peruse the inscription on a tomb stone. With large tears in her eyes Mrs. Dashwood fumbled her pockets, and taking out a half crown, placed it gently in the open hand of the sightless one. The hand didn't close on it. It didn't move. It just remained open waiting for more, and if anything the mendicant seemed to grow blinder. Maria produced a silver coin and dropped it in.

"I think everyone should give in a case like that," she said, as if apologising to her conscience. Maria was not famous for her benevolence. Polly and Tilly followed suit. But even then the hand remained open. The mendicant believed in the "open door" policy.

"Oh, well," remarked old John, digging down deep into his trouser pocket, "Ah sooppose Ah can spare a little."

"Give him something for me, too, Father," Peter suggested cheerfully. Peter always believed in giving quickly when the gift was from his parents' purse.

"Here's half a sovereign for yer," said old John, dropping the gold piece on top of the silver.

"God bless you, Sir!" murmured the blind man, closing his hand like a vice and stuffing the money into his pocket.

Meanwhile James, who was a keen observer, had been thinking hard.

"That's old Jimmy the Gambler, surely?" he said, with an amused smile.

At the sound of the name the blind man gave an impulsive start, and opened one of his eyes.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled, "it's old Jimmy."

"Well, well," commenced old John slowly.

"Damn it!" hissed the "blind" one, "don't stand there starin' then, when yer know me—d'yer want ter bring th' police on a cove?"

"Well, Ah'm be derved!" said old John, "if this ain't somethin! Look 'e here, Jimmy (raising his voice in indignation), Ah wish to th' Lord yer *was* blahnd!"

But James, who had all the laugh on his side, said: "Come on, leave him, Father; he did good work for us once, you know."

Then looking back, grinning and smiling at the impostor, the family strolled on.



"THAT'S OLD JIMMY THE GAMBLER, SURELY?"

They turned a congested corner, and entered the main street. Old John, with Mrs. Dashwood and little Andy, took the lead; Granny and Maria and the baby came next: behind them Polly and Tilly, and bringing up the rear were James and Peter.

Drifting along the crowded thoroughfare staggered an individual in a long ragged coat, a dented hard hat, torn boots, and a damaged eye. He steered to starboard and steadied up when he encountered our country friends, and eyed them with his good eye. He hiccupped twice, then in a cracked voice cried: "Halt! who (hic) goes there!" Polly and Tilly tittered and scurried to the side of their parent for safety. Old John stopped and stared at the commanding figure.

"Friends or (hic) foes?" demanded the queer one.

People passing turned in their haste and smiled feebly. They seemed familiar with the scene.

"Well, friends Ah hope," answered old John good-naturedly.

"Friends, eh—friends to what?" yelled the ragged one, raising his hand in dramatic gesture, "to torture and tyranny, or friends to the devil?"

"Come away, Father!" and Mrs. Dashwood tugged nervously at her husband's arm.

Peter laughed.

"*Scoffer!*" yelled the stranger.

Here a policeman came up, and with a scowl waved him on.

"Constable!" began the queer individual, "I could take you and——"

"Well, take *that*," and the Law delivered him a place kick with its large foot.

The man took it where his pants hung slack, and staggered off in a hurry.

Our friends all started to laugh, and old John, turning to the Law, asked it a leading question.

"He's a damn nuisance; if that's any inferrmation to yez," the constable snapped, and marched on.

Old John and James and Peter disposed themselves outside the door of the Great Emporium studying the traffic and the faces in the street while the others, lured away by the "cheap bargains," went in to make purchases.

A good half hour passed; then Maria, in a state of perspiration, appeared on the pavement dancing her bellowing offspring about to silence it

"It wants soomethin'," said old John. "Give it th' bottle."

"Oh, I gave it to her in there," Maria whined, "but she wouldn't take it!"

Then to the infant: "Oh, there! there! there! It's home I ought to take you!"

After a while the baby cried itself out and became calm, and Maria, taking courage again, beat back into the crowded emporium.

Five minutes later she appeared on the pavement again, shaking the squealing youngster about harder than ever.

"Did Mother (oh, you must be good, baby!) and the others come out?" she asked.

"We ain't seen 'em, girl," old John answered.

"I'm sure I don't know where they have got to, then!" moaned Maria. "And this baby! Oh, I'm sure it's no pleasure."

She turned into the emporium again and disappeared.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Peter.

"Poor Maria be in a bit of a fix!" murmured old John.

Another half hour, longer than the last, went by.

"Oh, blow this sort of thing!" growled James. And Peter wanted to know "what the deuce they were up to."

"Buyin' all th' shop, Ah think, lad," answered the parent.

Just then the absent ones all issued empty handed from the emporium, and all looked worried and disappointed—all but Polly, who was smiling behind her handkerchief.

"Well, I wouldn't have come out without buying an article, anyway!" Tilly was saying upbraidingly.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, it was hard to decide among such a lot of things," conciliatingly from Mrs. Dashwood.

"Indeed, if Tilly had a baby to look after all the time," Maria snapped "she wouldn't have bought anything either."

"Well," said old John in greeting them, "you must a' bought a big lot?"

Polly and Tilly with a side look at Maria tittered, and



"I'M GEORGE," DRAWLED THE PIGEON-TOED MAN.

On An Australian Farm

the family falling into line again, proceeded along the street.

"What crowds of people!" Mrs. Dashwood would gasp at intervals. "Just look at them! Dear me!"

"And amongst them all," Tilly would add, "we don't know a single soul!"

Suddenly old John stretched out his hands, and with a shout of joy impeded the progress of a short-legged pigeon-toed man with a large corporation, a tall hat, and an eye glass.

"*Tom Draggon!*" exclaimed old John, showing signs of embracing the fat gentleman; but instantly he hesitated as if a doubt had crossed his mind.

"Oh, Father's found some one," Polly cried, and the whole family turned and stared at the "friend."

"Waal, no, I'm not the draggon," drawled the pigeon-toed man, blinking at old John, "but I'm *George*."

"Ah-h," replied old John, apologetically, "h'm, Ah would a swore yow was Tom Draggon."

"No, don't swear, never do that," the fat man said, squeezing past, "it's a dangerous habit when the police are about," and he pointed with his chubby thumb to a young policeman standing near.

Old John turned to the Law.

"Who wer' thet?" he asked, pointing to the fat figure.

The policeman smiled and said "George Reid."



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